



# THE STRESS-FREE HABIT

Powerful Techniques  
for Health and Longevity  
from the Andes,  
Yucatan, and Far East

**John M. Perkins**

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Healing Arts Press  
Rochester, Vermont

To L. Moody, who, when I was a child, awakened my imagination and inspired me to travel the journey within as well as to foreign lands.

To my wife, Winifred, and daughter, Jessica, for all their support, patience, and—especially—their love.

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# Prologue

The Delta flight touched down at Palm Beach International Airport. I allowed myself a sigh of relief. After three days of intensive negotiations with financial institutions, I felt confident that at last we could meet the deadline. My company had spent almost a million dollars on project development and had until December 31 to obtain fifty million dollars. If I failed to secure the financing commitment by year-end, we would lose a major contract and the project would collapse. It was Friday, December 13.

As I drove to my office, I thought about Christmas, my wife, and my three-year-old daughter. The last four months had been the busiest—and scariest—of my life. My family and I had not seen much of each other. Now that would change!

It was nearly 5:30 p.m. and the office was deserted. The phone was ringing. I hesitated. I did not want to keep my family waiting for the good news, but perhaps it was my wife. I picked up the phone.

I was surprised to hear the voice of the Chief Financial Officer of the engineering firm that had worked hand-in-hand with us during the financing stage. I felt a surge of adrenaline. Was something wrong?

“You don’t want to hear this, John,” the CFO said. “After you left, the bank pulled out.”

My breath caught in my throat. My heart slammed like a sledge hammer. “It can’t happen.”

It did happen. On a Friday the thirteenth! Less than two weeks before Christmas. Three weeks before a deadline that, if not met, would result in the loss of a fifty million dollar project. Investors who trusted me would be out one million dollars. I would lose my company. Even worse, I would lose my reputation.

How do you live with a thing like that? How do you walk through the door of your home and face your wife and daughter? How do you sleep at night? Avoid depression? Prepare for Christmas?

Fortunately, you *can* do all of the above. There are very practicable ways of handling stress. They are simple and quick. By the time I reached home shortly before 7:00 p.m., I was relaxed and ready to spend an enjoyable pre-holiday weekend with my family.

When I returned to my office on Monday morning, I was eager to charge into battle once again. The most valuable weapon in our company arsenal was not the project package we had spent three years assembling—land options, permits, licenses, and

contracts. It was not our network of contacts with the financial community. Our most valuable weapon was an ability to handle stress. Without this, we could not have accomplished what we had to during those few critical days.

The way we controlled stress was through a process that I call the “stress-free habit.” There is nothing mysterious about it. The components of the process have been used by millions of people throughout the world. It is most effective and most fun when it does, in fact, become a habit and is practiced for ten to twenty minutes once or twice a day.

This book describes the stress-free habit in a way that will allow you to begin practicing it immediately. You will find it benefits you physically, emotionally, and psychologically. It will lower the probability of heart attack and stroke; you, like many others, may find that problems such as insomnia, headaches, diarrhea, constipation, and nervous disorders are eliminated. If used regularly, it should help you to succeed in situations where otherwise you would have failed. Because it is a constructive habit, the more you work at it, the more enjoyable and beneficial it becomes. If you wait until you’re up against a “Friday the thirteenth” situation, it may be much more difficult to apply.

Much of this book is devoted to describing people from other cultures—Java, the Yucatan, high Andes, and Sulawesi—who were instrumental in my development of the stress-free habit. These people are members of societies where stress control is a part of the daily routine. The techniques they practice may date back hundreds of years, but, as you will see, modern medical science recently has proven that these techniques are as powerful as many prescription drugs. Unlike the drugs, they have no harmful side effects and are not addictive.

Beginning in 1968 I spent many years traveling throughout the world. I worked as a consultant and taught management skills. During this same period, science was learning some very important truths about stress. One of these was that I came from a society where stress management was held in low esteem while many of my students came from societies where stress is effectively controlled. My society tended to look down its somewhat snobbish nose at stress management techniques and to refer to them in terms like “unscientific,” “trendy,” and “fraudulent,” despite the fact that Harvard Medical School and other prestigious research institutions were proving otherwise and despite the fact that crippling and fatal stress-related diseases were reaching near epidemic proportions in my society.

I asked the obvious question: Why? After I found answers, I asked the next obvious question: While teaching business management skills, why not learn stress management skills? The students of the first might well be the best teachers of the second. *The Stress-Free Habit* is a result of my search for answers to those questions.

Before introducing my students and teachers, I want to acquaint you with some of the other truths modern science has learned about stress. The first chapter will “set the stage,” concentrating on a definition of stress, recent scientific findings, and the

background of the various techniques.

## CHAPTER 1

# STRESS IN OUR CULTURE

Early man, seated before a cave trying to light a fire, suffered from stress. In Biblical times, sacrifices were offered to combat it. Shakespeare alluded to it often. Throughout history, soldiers, philosophers, businessmen, politicians, and artists have sought remedies.

Stress has been around as long as humans. It is experienced by individuals in every society. Methods for dealing with stress, however, vary greatly. Medical doctors will tell you: “Stress doesn’t kill; the way we react to stress is what kills.”

Most people are familiar with how stress influences them mentally and emotionally. Depression, lethargy, lack of motivation, extreme nervousness, an inability to cope, loss of appetite, difficulties in thinking a situation through: these are but a few of the complaints expressed by people suffering from stress. Such symptoms can be compounded by severe biological impacts on the circulatory, respiratory, and neurological systems.

How we deal with stress can make the difference between health and sickness and life and death. It may alter the way we look at the world around us. It affects our feelings about ourselves. Coping with stress can increase our productivity. It can make us healthier. And it can result in fuller, happier, more relaxed lives.

Although stress exists among people throughout the world, it is most pronounced in the more technologically advanced societies. A number of theories have been formulated to explain this. Two schools of thought predominate and may be summarized as follows:

1. The technologically advanced nations lost interest in nonmaterialistic ideas during the last century. Along with religion and philosophy, methods of dealing with stress took a back seat to science, engineering, and business.
2. The shakers and movers must subject themselves to heavy stress loads in order to accomplish the tasks necessary to elevate a nation to technologically advanced status.

These schools of thought are not contradictory; it is likely that both are at least



partially correct. Regardless of theories, the unfortunate fact is that many people in the technologically advanced societies subject themselves to large doses of stress; their cultures are not likely to provide much help since they fail to incorporate approaches for controlling stress into daily life routines. The result is that stress-related illnesses have reached epidemic proportions.

In order to find societies where dealing with stress is an inherent part of the culture, we can turn to Asia and Latin America. Many cultures in these parts of the world have made stress control an important aspect of everyday life. Stress-reducing philosophies are learned at an early age. Throughout life, members of these societies are encouraged by their peers to practice—either as individuals or as participants in social rituals—techniques aimed at minimizing stress. Religious, educational, political, business, and social systems all contribute to this process.

Nearly a decade of work in Asia and Latin America taught me that some of the stress-control techniques are universally applicable. Not only do these particular techniques work for members of that society where I found them, they also work for me and for a majority of others who try them. Descriptions of several of these societies and techniques are provided in subsequent chapters.

I want to emphasize that I make no value judgments about the virtues of one society or one religion versus another. This book is devoted to the subject of stress and methods for controlling it. Stress is but one of many factors that affect the quality of life. When I describe a Mayan Indian who practices a technique that reduces his blood pressure, I do not mean to suggest that you or I would be better off living in a thatched-roof hut in the Yucatan. My intent is simply to share with you a stress control method of universal interest: it works in a society represented by that Indian, and it works for others outside his society. If practicing that technique while sitting in your car at a stoplight brings you peace of mind and better health, then this book has accomplished its purpose.

A friend who attended the Harvard Business School likes to quote a favorite professor. On the last day of classes, the professor was asked for the one most valuable piece of advice that he would like to leave with his students. He thought for a minute, smiled, and said: “Stay tense.”

To achieve material success in a technologically advanced society, it may be necessary to subject yourself to lots of stress. One could well argue that this is absolutely unavoidable. However, it is not necessary to “stay tense.” In fact, strong evidence indicates that the people who learn to control their stress are the most successful.

A later chapter describes a characteristic shared by many Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers that is incorporated as one of the elements in the stress-free habit. There are multiple forces working to encourage us to “stay tense.” We will be happier, more successful, and healthier if we learn to cope with these forces, relax, and adopt the stress-free habit as part of our regular routines.

## WHAT IS STRESS?

A great deal has been written about stress. The causes and effects are well documented and need not be detailed here.<sup>\*1</sup> You do not have to be knowledgeable about the biology of stress to benefit from the approaches described in this book. However, it may help to keep in mind the following key points.

- All people suffer from some form of stress. When stress becomes severe, it often results in serious physical as well as emotional ailments: atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), hypertension, depression, suicide, heart attack, and stroke. Over 50% of deaths in the United States each year are the result of diseases associated with stress.
- When we are confronted by something that frightens us, a problem that appears unsolvable, or a situation that requires behavioral changes, our bodies respond immediately. Rates of increase occur in the circulatory and respiratory systems; blood pressure and breathing patterns accelerate. Our bodies have taken a protective measure, popularly known as the “flight-or-fight” response. A well-documented biological event, this response is shared by humans and animals and is extremely helpful when the individual faces physical danger. In common terminology, the “adrenaline gets flowing.” If the problem can be solved through flight-or-fight, the solution itself dissipates the stress; bodily functions return to normal. However, when stress is caused by a problem that cannot be solved through such a response, the impacts extend for longer periods and may ultimately result in crippling or fatal diseases.
- Stressful situations may become deadly very rapidly. The following is typical of the way our bodies react. When the brain receives a “danger” signal, it flashes messages throughout the body. Hormones are secreted. The circulatory system reacts immediately, preparing us to fight or run. Blood pressure and heart rate increase. Because the heart works harder, it requires abnormally high levels of oxygen. The respiratory system may become overtaxed. In an individual with a coronary weakness, such as an obstructed artery, the systems fail to handle the load. Heart attack, and possibly death, result.
- Biologically speaking, the flight-or-fight response causes the “involuntary nervous system” to respond. Hormones, including adrenaline, insulin, hydrocortisone, and noradrenaline, are released. They stimulate our bodily systems. Heart, blood pressure, and metabolic rates increase dramatically. Levels of gastric acid, blood cholesterol, glandular secretions, and muscle tension rise. Until recently, scientists believed that the “involuntary nervous system” was just that. When I was a high

school biology student, we were taught that individuals could not control these functions except through external influences, such as medication.

- In recent years researchers have demonstrated that humans and other animals can exert voluntary control over the “involuntary nervous system.” Experiments conducted by Dr. Neil E. Miller in 1969 proved that “biofeedback” techniques are successful at regulating blood flow. Scientists using sensitive equipment in laboratory environments substantiated that practitioners of yoga have developed the ability to control oxygen consumption, blood pressure, and body temperature. A 1968 study conducted at the Harvard Medical School found that people who meditate regularly are able to reduce their oxygen consumption by up to 20%, decrease blood lactates (associated with feelings of anxiety), and induce higher levels of brain activity related to states of tranquillity and a feeling of well-being (Alpha waves). Further studies conducted by members of this same research team in 1981 documented the ability of Tibetan monks to increase temperatures of specific body parts (fingers, toes, and skin) by as much as 15 degrees Fahrenheit during meditation.
- Medical doctors are very aware of the direct connections between stress and illness. For example, it is common for hyperventilation to occur under stress. Dizziness, breathing problems, and chest pains are relieved by employing measures to mitigate the stress and bring respiratory patterns back under control. Similarly, ulcers, intestinal problems, and chronic headache are associated with stress. Doctors orient programs for dealing with such illnesses around procedures intended to relieve stress. Regardless of the nature of the illness—from the common cold to cancer—patients are advised to rest, relax, and adopt schedules that will reduce stress.
- Research has found a strong link between stress and depression. Studies conducted at the National Institute of Mental Health suggest that this link may be through a brain chemical called corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH), which causes biochemical changes in the body. Stressful events activate CRH secretions, and this results in a release by the pituitary of a hormone known as ACTH. ACTH in turn stimulates the production of cortisol by the adrenal gland. And this product, cortisol, is found at high levels during periods of depression. Experiments with animals indicate that when they have high levels of CRH, animals appear disoriented, inhibited, and confused. Heart rate, blood pressure, and blood glucose levels rise; sex drive and appetites are suppressed.
- Levels of cortisol also have an impact on the body’s immunity to disease. Cortisol can bind directly to the receptors within lymphocytes (the type of blood cells involved in fighting infections). Studies show that stressful events, such as a spouse’s death, may result in impaired functioning of the lymphocytes. The person who has experienced the stressful event becomes more prone to illness and sudden

death. Researchers at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York found that widowers have a significantly weakened lymphocyte function within two months of their wives' deaths. Widowers over 55 years old have a 40% higher mortality rate within six months of their wives' death than nonwidowers in the same age group.

- A growing body of research implicates stress as a factor in the cause of cancer. Studies conducted at a number of institutions indicate that activity levels of cells that identify and destroy cancer are likely to be lower in people experiencing high levels of stress than in people with less stress. The reduced activity levels make it easier for the cancer cells to multiply. Cancer patients' attitudes are an important factor in the recovery process. Those who truly believe they will recover and experience less stress regarding their situation have a greater chance of recovering than those with less positive attitudes and higher stress levels.
- Under normal conditions, environment is an important factor in determining stress levels. During the Vietnam War, doctors recorded high blood pressure and high metabolic rates among combat soldiers. The 1985 Mexico City earthquake resulted in marked increases in blood pressure; tests conducted by physicians established that these abnormalities continued for several days after the quakes had ceased. Numerous studies indicate that blood pressure rises when people move from rural to urban environments.

I have heard many answers to the question: What is stress? One that sums it up succinctly is this: *Stress is a state that occurs when we believe we are unable to solve a problem.* The problem may be an obvious one or it may be subtle. Certainly, it is one requiring some solution other than the traditional flight-or-fight response.

A state of stress is like a state of siege. Our bodies, primarily the "involuntary nervous system," take actions intended to defend us. We are armed with flight-or-fight weapons. Unfortunately, these weapons are not easily deactivated; if neither flight nor fight is the appropriate defense, our weapons may explode in our own hands. What we must do is gain control of the "involuntary nervous system." We must assure that flight-or-fight weapons remain unloaded unless a truly appropriate situation occurs.

There is no longer any question about an individual's capabilities in the area of voluntarily deactivating the flight-or-fight response. Studies conducted at our most prestigious research and medical facilities confirm that techniques that have been practiced for centuries by Asian and Latin American cultures are effective. As Dr. Larry Dossey, M.D., stated in his 1982 book *Space, Time and Medicine*, "Experiments have shown that if subjects are taught to meditate, blood cholesterol levels fall by an average of 20 percent. Moreover, other aspects of the time syndrome respond: blood pressure, heart and respiratory rate as well as the blood levels of insulin, hydrocortisone, adrenaline and norepinephrine are modified to more desirable levels... . Many methods

are effective: meditative disciplines, biofeedback, progressive relaxation and autogenic therapy.”

Reports published in 1987 about studies completed at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York confirm the ability of individuals to relax themselves in a way that traditional medicine has previously attributed to chemical tranquilizers alone.<sup>\*2</sup> Of 147 cancer patients, 70 took alprazolam, a powerful tranquilizer used to combat the pain, anxiety, depression, and nausea caused by chemotherapy, while 77 listened to a progressive relaxation tape. Both therapies were administered three times a day. The relaxation technique was found to be as effective as the tranquilizer. Since they do not have the dangerous side-effect potentials of drugs, progressive relaxation and similar meditative techniques are expected to become increasingly important in the treatment of many diseases. Research such as that conducted at Sloan-Kettering has provided valuable insights into the relationship between stress and health.

We know that, as far as stress is concerned, we are the master of our destinies. Each of us is equipped with tools that make stress control easy and enjoyable. These tools enable us to manage the “involuntary nervous system.” We can, in fact, keep it deactivated.

## **THE STRESS-FREE HABIT**

The stress-free habit is simple to learn and easy to practice on a regular basis. It involves five elements. Each has proven to be successful at controlling stress. Taken together, they can have a profound impact.

The stress-free habit utilizes the natural powers of our nervous, hormonal, respiratory, and circulatory systems to achieve a state in which the mind and body are rejuvenated. We all possess these powers as a birth-given right. The technique does not require any special physical or emotional capabilities; nor does it rely on outside forces such as medication, exercise, diet, therapy, or hypnosis. And yet, the results are scientifically demonstrable. You will discover that regular use of the stress-free habit results in lower rates of breathing and metabolism, lower heart rate, and lower blood pressure. At the same time, blood lactates decrease while alpha-wave rates increase. The stress-free habit is likely to help you feel better within days. For many, its techniques have cured ailments such as drug and alcohol abuse, insomnia, diarrhea, constipation, cramps, and headaches. It has no dangerous side effects.

The next four chapters of this book describe experiences and people in foreign lands. These helped me to appreciate the importance of making stress control a part of my everyday life. Comparing the age-old techniques practiced in such societies with current scientific thought puts stress management in an interesting perspective.

The cultures of Java, the Yucatan, Sulawesi, and the Andes teach that managing stress can be fun as well as rewarding. I will be forever grateful to Toyup, Viejo Itza, Mr. Bendra, the Mayor, and Don José Quischpe; they are the spirits behind my understanding

of the stress-free habit.

The last chapter provides an approach that will enable you to incorporate the stress-free habit into your life. You will see that this is extremely simple. It requires only ten to twenty minutes a day and will leave you feeling more relaxed.

By the time you finish reading this book, you should have learned to employ the five basic elements of the stress-free habit to your advantage. These are:

1. Be who you wish to be; cease trying to *become* and *be*. Think about the person in you who embodies what you most highly value; be that person to the fullest extent. Make this a part of your life at all times.
2. Balance the problem-solution issue; realize that the problem is not the problem, but rather that the lack of a solution is the problem. Whenever problems arise, assess their true nature and magnitude; do not allow yourself to panic or be overly negative. Decide on a solution and try it.
3. Concentrate. Get in the habit of concentrating and compartmentalizing. When you work, work; when you leave work, leave it completely and focus on your family, hobby, or whatever it is you wish to do.
4. Have faith. Believe in what you know is right; believe in a religion, yourself, an idea, or a goal. The nature of your belief is not important as far as stress reduction is concerned; what is important is that you have faith in that which is most meaningful to you. Open your heart, listen to it, and follow its commands.
5. Meditate. Meditation—while sitting quietly, during prayer, or as part of an exercise routine—should be used to tie the other elements together and provide ten to fifteen minutes of relaxation on a regular basis.

All these elements are simple. They and techniques for incorporating them into your routine will be discussed throughout this book. They may seem self-evident. If so, you are off to a good start. The rewards will come when you have integrated them into your daily life. At that point they will create a habit that will enrich your life and, quite possibly, extend it.

## CHAPTER 2

# JAVA

*“Do not try to become. Be. If you always try to become, you will never be what you want. That is no way for a wise man to live.”*

**Toyup**

My first job in the Orient would take me to Indonesia, known by early Europeans as the Spice Islands. For me, the country conjured images of exotic adventures. Here was a land of myth, mysticism, and exotic beauty; an illusive treasure sought, but never found, by Columbus; a princess wooed, but not seduced, by the rulers of Holland, Spain, Portugal, and Japan. Indonesia: the very name excited my imagination. It was the home of Balinese dancers, holy men reputed to perform superhuman feats, poets, and warriors. It seemed a long way—in distance, time, and spirit—from the Boston offices of the consulting firm where I worked.

Hours spent studying the language and reading about the people in books provided by the Boston Public Library reinforced my romantic fantasies. A Harvard Square window displayed a poster of Javanese beauties in batik skirts strolling along a moonlit beach. I could almost smell the luscious fragrance of orchids and cloves. The Spice Islands! Friends invited me to sample varieties of Java beans at a Cambridge coffee house. An acquaintance lent me a recording of gamelan music. Developed in Java over a millennium ago, the gamelan orchestra is dominated by an instrument played like the xylophone; the sound resembles temple bells. Everywhere I walked I seemed to hear the bells.

My expectations, like those of treasure hunters, were high. Like them, I might have learned from experiences in other parts of the world to temper my enthusiasm. Although I would discover that the chest does contain treasures, I would find that it takes time and patience to uncover real treasure. What we perceive is related to how we look. The true sound of the bell is heard by the heart, not the ears.

My first days in Jakarta were ones of shock. Indonesia’s capital revealed itself to be different from what I had expected.

The beauty was there: lush gardens ablaze with tropical flowers; dark-skinned ladies sporting batik sarongs; opulent shops; elegant dancers from Bali as well as from Sumatra and Java; gamelan music; bicycle-cabs decorated with fanciful scenes in rainbow colors on the sides of the box-like seats where passengers reclined in front of the peddling

drivers; picturesque mosques; and Dutch colonial houses. But there was also an ugly, tragic side to Jakarta: lepers begging for coins; child prostitutes; once-splendid canals turned into cesspools—grim reminders of Indonesia’s Dutch inheritance; cardboard-and-rubbish hovels where the poor live along the rotting banks of the canals; choking gas fumes adding to the stagnant air and stifling heat; and blaring horns from endless traffic. The beautiful and the ugly. This was Jakarta: the scent of cloves (from a local brand of cigarette), orchid blossoms, and the wonderful aroma of food cooked in peanut oil on sidewalk grills, battling for dominance over the fetid stench of open sewers.

Undoubtedly my bombarded senses were further taxed by jet lag and the meetings I attended during my first week in Indonesia. It had been a long journey, half way around the world, from Boston. On the morning following my evening arrival I had been hustled into the first of many long negotiating sessions between the Indonesian government and the Asian Development Bank. I was part of a team retained by the government to help them obtain a low-interest loan from the bank. The meetings were arduous. Like so many, they were simultaneously boring and stressful.

“How can you look so refreshed?” I asked Mr. Suja, one of my Indonesian employers. The meeting had broken for tea. Balancing tiny cups in our palms we stood on a balcony overlooking a garden and parking lot.

“We have our ways,” he answered. “But for you, I think it is very difficult. This is your first visit. It takes time to learn the ways of our people.”

“And where does one begin?”

“First you must decide which people. I am Javanese. But there are many others. Thousands of islands. Hundreds of cultures. Jakarta is all of them thrown together. And it is none. Many people here have forgotten who they are. They have lost their own cultures and have found nothing to replace them. It is sad.”

We returned to the negotiations. That evening as we were leaving the building Mr. Suja pulled me aside.

“If you are really interested in learning about my country,” he said, “I would suggest starting in Bandung. It is the regional center of West Java, a few hours by car or train from Jakarta. I will be happy to arrange for you to stay in a government guest house there. It would be an ideal place for you to complete your report.”

I became a part of Java as soon as I left the outskirts of Jakarta. I knew, heading into the mountains, that this was the Indonesia I had hoped to find. Memories of the sweltering city dissolved in cool mountain breezes.

The driver provided by Mr. Suja stopped frequently. He insisted that I get out of the car, stretch, breathe the air, and take photographs. When he discovered that I had acquired a rudimentary knowledge of *Bahasa Indonesia*, he encouraged me to speak with



passersby. These were peasants meeting their first American. Their manner was one of unreserved cheerfulness. They greeted me like an old friend. Some carried long poles balanced on slender shoulders; buckets tied to the ends of the poles sprang up and down in cadence with their steps. Most wore wide-brimmed straw hats. They worked in the rice, coffee, and tea lands. Their skin was weathered. Teeth were missing. Clothes were patched and thread-bare. And they laughed a great deal.

We drove on, higher and higher into the mountains. We came to a village where barefoot boys kicked a ball down the street in front of us as if challenging our jeep to a game. After leaving them, I commented to the driver that the boys looked skinny and poor.

“I’m Javanese,” he said proudly, pressing a thumb into his chest. “These are my people. We are not poor. Those boys may not have money, but they are not poor.”

A short time later, he parked the jeep at a spot where the road hung out over a long valley. We walked to the edge. An orange flower grew from a bush beside us. He knelt and, as if in prayer, remained staring at it for several long moments. When at last he rose, he turned and spoke softly. “No one who has all this is poor.” His smile was gentle. “I need to check the engine. You may wait here, if you please.”

Although he did in fact lift the hood and rattle around under it, I suspect his intent was to leave me alone with the view. I’ve since wondered whether our trip’s itinerary had been planned by him alone or whether Mr. Suja had taken a hand in it. In any case, the journey was accomplishing what Mr. Suja had hoped it would. My eyes were drawn to the flower. I felt pulled by it, almost as though I were passing through it into the valley beyond.

By the time we reached the government guest house outside Bandung, I was enchanted with Java. The house itself had been built during the Dutch colonial period; its large veranda opened to a vista of rolling hills, tea plantations, and the mountains that, when we arrived, were slowly fading into the purple shadows of evening. Jakarta seemed far away.

An old man came trotting down the steps from the veranda. Loose-fitting trousers flapped about his ankles. His batik shirt portrayed the hero-gods of Javanese mythology. As I stepped from the jeep, he grinned and, touching his fingertips together, bowed.

“Me Toyup,” he said.

I ended up spending a month at the Bandung guest house. During that time I came to know a part of Toyup well, for he was a remarkably sharing and open person. I could not have guessed at the time we met that this man would start me on a journey that would continue for many years.

I would realize later that I had spent much of my life preparing for this journey;

however, it was Toyup who gave me the shove needed to set the process in motion.

He had lived all his life in the mountains of Java. Although he could not recall his age, his memories of working for the Dutch when they ruled his land and then for the Japanese after their World War II invasion were vivid. When I met him he must have been close to eighty. Toyup was living proof that a person can travel great distances without changing his geographic location. He taught me that the true journey is the journey within.

Despite his broken English and my limited Indonesian, we spent many wonderful evenings talking together on the veranda as the sun set in tropical splendor over the tea fields. Sometimes, following breakfast or in the late afternoon, we would leave the guest house and Toyup would show me his Indonesia. We would walk along ancient roads passing through cultivated lands and into the *kampongs*, or villages, crowded with peasants who seemed never to cease laughing. Toyup showed me an Indonesia that was materially impoverished and spiritually rich.

Toyup had experienced much of life and possessed a rare ability to translate his experiences into a knowledge that could be passed on to others. Like the batik he wore, his stories were a blend. Buddhism from the Japanese was interwoven with Islam, the prominent religion in modern Indonesia. Throughout, there ran the mysticism of the Ramayana tradition that came from India centuries ago.

There was one theme that dominated all others. This, more than anything else, characterized Toyup. It fortified him with a strength that had seen him through a lifetime of hardship and that, despite his advanced age, made him appear at times like an innocent youth eager to take on new adventures in life. Toyup's stories reflected his strong personal belief that we are what we will ourselves to be, that we must *be*, at all times, rather than attempt to *become*. Several times he told me versions of the O-Nami ("Great Waves") story.

O-Nami was a well-known wrestler of superb strength and fighting knowledge. He could defeat anyone, even his instructor, as long as he fought in private. Public appearances were a different matter. He became self-conscious, unsure of himself. He made foolish mistakes and often lost to wrestlers of inferior ability.

One night a master instructor visited him. The master was reputed to be one of the wisest. "O-Nami," he said, "You are the Great Waves. You must believe it. Be it. Go to your room. Stay awake the night through and think about Great Waves. Believe in what you are. You are those gigantic swells that destroy everything in their path."

O-Nami retired to his room. All night long he meditated. At first he merely thought about waves. Other visions intruded, but he brushed them aside. Gradually, as the night wore on, the waves took over. They filled the room, rushing and swirling around him. When the sun rose on O-Nami's room, it was a flood of

thundering waves.

After that O-Nami became the champion wrestler. No one was able to defeat him.

Toyup delighted in this story. He liked to relate it to his personal life. Born into a peasant family, more than anything else, he craved education. However, his parents were too poor. He was sent out to the tea fields at an early age with no hope of schooling.

“But,” he would say, his face breaking into a toothless grin, “Toyup said to self: ‘I wise, I learn fast, no need money for schools.’” He left the fields and made his way to Bandung where he found a job as servant to a Dutch merchant. “I sleep little, work hard and then during night I practice Dutch, become interpreter and get much schooling from Dutch people.” When the Dutch retreated before the Japanese invasion, Toyup repeated the process. He learned Japanese.

“You see,” he would say, eyes bright with excitement, “I never try to become educated. I educated. I always tell self: ‘Self, you wise. Work hard, always more to learn, yes, but do not try to become. Be. If you always try to become, you will never be what you want. That is no way for a wise man to live.’ Now I know all about Holland, Japan, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Americans. Back when small boy, I say: ‘Toyup, be wise.’ I meditate on this. I wise. Just like O-Nami.”

Toyup meditated each morning before breakfast. And again in the evening. He would excuse himself from the veranda and disappear for twenty to forty minutes. When he returned, he would comment briefly about the benefits he derived from this meditation. As I look back, I realize that in his own way he was encouraging me to follow his example. Because meditation had always seemed to me to be highly personal, I was reluctant to ask him about it; yet I was curious to learn his technique. I wondered whether his approach would be different from those taught by transcendental meditation and other schools that had become trendy in Western cultures during the 1960s.

One morning as we walked toward a *kampong* I casually mentioned that I too had meditated. He smiled and nodded. “Very good,” he said. “You like?” I told him I had enjoyed it, but felt I really did not know how to meditate well. I took his silence to signify shyness, probably because I myself felt embarrassed, as though I were intruding into a private realm that we could not share. As it turned out, Toyup was not at all shy in this regard.

That evening he asked me if I would like to join him the next morning. Of course, I agreed.

He lived in a tiny room at the back of the guest house. I went there shortly after dawn. The furnishings were simple: a pallet for sleeping on the floor, and an old wooden trunk. On top of the trunk was a photograph of Toyup surrounded by children.

“My grandchildren,” he said. “Wife dead many years. But family big. Much love.” Slowly he sat down on the pallet, indicating that I should do likewise.

“Toyup,” I said, “I’m not sure I know how to do this the right way.”

“Oh ho. You know, there is no right way. Only your way. But... .” He laughed at what he knew would sound contradictory. “There two ways I like best. You first total relax. Let body go away. All muscles lie down take nap. Then do one or other of two ways.

“Think one word. Always same word. The name you call ‘God’ is good. Or ‘Love.’ Say this word when let out breath. Think nothing; only this word. No other thought.

“Or other way. You are fish. When breath goes out, bubbles go up. Relax mind. See things in bubbles. What enters mind, see in bubble for tiny time. Bubble pops, thought gone. New one comes in new bubble. Remember fish.”

This was a simple and enjoyable process. In Bandung, I had only to complete writing my report and was under little pressure; nevertheless, I found that meditating with Toyup brought me peace of mind in a way I had not known before. And it answered my question: his techniques were similar to those taught in Western cultures. However, Toyup assigned no great importance to the use of a special word or “mantra” (which, according to some practitioners, has to be divulged by a trained specialist who, in the West, collects a hefty fee for the service!).

One evening Toyup and I walked along a road that twisted through tea plantations. We passed small groups of Javanese workers headed home after a long day. They ranged in age from infants to the ancient. Their broad-brimmed straw hats shielded their eyes but not their flashing smiles. They laughed and joked among themselves and exchanged friendly greetings with us. Several stopped to chat.

After one animated and happy conversation, Toyup turned to me. “These my people,” he said, “They work hard but never forget to have fun. Some sick and old. But they’re who they are. Today is all there is, so they love today.”

As we headed home that evening, Toyup talked about the Japanese. They had been invaders and like most invaders had committed acts of brutality; resentment still smolders among many older Indonesians. However, Toyup did not discuss this; rather he emphasized the deep respect he held for the Japanese because of what they had accomplished after the war. “You know,” he said, “They were people who rather die than take defeat. But they lost war. They were” (he searched for the word and with my help found it) “yes, humiliated. But they come back. From ashes they grow. They say: ‘we great people, we not take defeat, we win.’” He looked at the sky and spread his arms in an arc. “Now they win. With car, TV, computer, camera. Everything!”

After I left Toyup and returned to my room, I sat looking out at the shadowy black mountains and the stars shining above them. My mind returned to the Harvard Square

window with its poster of a moonlit beach. Then to Mr. Suja standing on the balcony, tea cup in hand. The orange flower his driver had shown me. Toyup. And O-Nami.

I was a long way from home, half way around the world from Harvard Square. The romantic image of the travel poster and the reality of Java's mountains looming in the distance intermingled and seemed to mock some part of my conscious thinking—my way of looking at the world—that had been ingrained since early childhood.

While the distance between Boston and Bandung could be measured in miles, the distance between Toyup's culture and my own would have to be plotted on an inner map where the units of measure are subjective and where—as on the charts of ancient mariners—vast areas are still marked “unknown,” “unexplored,” or “information unavailable.” It seemed, as I sat there staring at distant galaxies, that my journey from Boston to Jakarta had been miniscule compared to the inner journey that had been set in motion when I left Jakarta and headed for Bandung.

I sat quietly. My body was relaxed. I focused on the memory of the orange flower. My mind pulled me through it and I seemed to float above the valley. I saw myself as a cocoon surrounding the valley and yet somehow the valley also engulfed me. In the midst of this experience, I understood that reality is just another perception. It is an inner phenomenon, beginning and ending in the minds of each and every one of us.

Toyup was educated because he perceived himself to be educated. O-Nami had changed nothing but his own perception. I could feel my thoughts wandering back across the Pacific. In my mind's eye I saw the bright lights of a television studio illuminating the familiar faces of two American athletes. Both had said they were champions long before the world accepted the fact. Both acted like champions prior to gaining their titles. Both *were* before they had *become*. I wondered what would have happened if either Mohammed Ali or Joe Namath had thought of himself as a runner-up.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE YUCATAN

*“What makes a person wise is his willingness to fail. The difference between a man we respect as successful and the one we call a failure is that the first has failed and tried again when the second has merely failed... Failure does not always indicate a wrong solution. More often, failure is due to lack of attention. You must concentrate.”*

**Viejo Itza**

Mexico’s Yucatán Peninsula is an odd combination of ultramodern resorts, primeval jungles, Spanish colonial towns, Indian villages, and mammoth pyramids constructed by the Mayan Empire. It is to the latter that I have often found myself returning, drawn by the mystery of a people who, long before Columbus sailed for the Spice Islands (and landed in America), devised a calendar more accurate than the one we use today, constructed stone buildings that soar twenty stories high, created their own written language, and then abandoned all they had developed and returned to the jungles.

Today many Mayas live much as their ancestors did, in thatch and mud huts near the ruins. They speak the old language, dress like their forefathers, and continue to worship ancient gods. Mayan guards close the gates to the ruins at sunset; but the morning visitor may find the melted wax of a ceremonial candle dripping down the sides of a stone carving as a reminder of the night’s activities.

A Mayan ruin would not seem a likely place to encounter a man who espouses theories about problem solving that reflect the practices of Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers. Yet Viejo Itza is such a man.

*Viejo* in Spanish means old. *Itza* is a Mayan name. I first saw him sitting in the shade of the Magician’s Pyramid at Uxmal. He watched me intently, his chin resting on wrinkled hands that cupped the top of a walking stick. When I returned his look, he motioned for me to sit next to him.

“You know much about the Maya.” It was a statement. I told him that I had tried to learn, but still many questions remained.

“Yes.” His head nodded slowly, “I have watched you and know what you mean. There are many questions. I can help you answer some. Not all.”

Viejo Itza worked as a guide at the ruins. For a few dollars each day, he took tourists through Uxmal. He had a severe limp. The walking stick served as a cane. Despite this inconvenience he never seemed to tire. I attributed his energy to the fact that he enjoyed his job with a passion. In his eyes, you could see the excitement over what he was doing. You could hear it in his voice. And sense it through the way his arms and hands moved as he described the Mayan buildings surrounding him.

After we became friends, Viejo Itza told me that he had watched me for several days before that afternoon when I had noticed him sitting at the foot of the Magician's Pyramid. He had perceived something different from what he had come to expect from tourists. "You were not only an observer," he told me. "You were absorbed. You looked to be dreaming or meditating. You were trying to participate. That is the Mayan way." I took that as a compliment and an invitation to draw closer to his world. During the next two weeks I often hovered at the fringes of groups who hired him. I listened, watched, and tried to live the experience as he lived it.

His approach as a guide varied according to the interests of his clientele. For those who were truly appreciative, he took great pains to explain Mayan architecture, agricultural techniques, and social customs. His lectures were enriched by wonderful stories about the modern Maya as well as the myths and folklore of his ancestors. Although the subject was fascinating, I found that more and more during the days I spent at Uxmal my interests shifted from the Maya in general to this one man in particular.

Late one afternoon, after the tourists had left, we walked together into town. The air was filled with smoke from little fires burning the tall grasses and brush back from the side of the road. It had been a long day. Viejo Itza had spent most of it with a large tour group of students from U.S. universities. From the way he walked, I knew that the lame leg was hurting more than usual, and I asked him about it. He told me that in his youth he had been hired to work with a crew of excavators at an early Mayan archeological site. One evening as the men sat around chatting, he accepted the challenge of a co-worker to race to the top of a pyramid. During the mad dash he slipped on a loose stone. The headlong fall down the side of the towering structure left him with a permanent limp.

The accident changed his life. Work for a cripple is difficult to obtain in the Yucatán. Viejo Itza's injury was so serious that he might have spent the rest of his days relying on charity from others. Like so many cripples throughout the world, he could have lived with his family and subsisted on begging. Instead he took up the study of archeology and eventually became a tourist guide.

When I met him, he was held in high esteem by his people. Men, women, and especially children sought his counsel. They came to him, it seemed to me, much as their peers in the more technologically advanced societies go to psychologists. However, there was a difference. Viejo Itza was more than a counselor; he was also a close friend who somehow was able to maintain a certain objectivity when dealing with their problems.

Now that a friendship had opened between us, there followed more occasions when,

after Uxmal's gates were closed for the evening, I walked with Viejo Itza back into town. On these occasions, we would sit outside a little cantina sipping beer. Others who sought conversation and his advice would join us. Although the conversations might be highly personal and despite the fact that Mayan was their preferred language, they spoke Spanish because they knew that to do otherwise would be to exclude me, his guest.

I listened to Viejo Itza's counsel on many subjects. What impressed me most was that he tried to teach his listeners an approach to problem-solving; he did not volunteer solutions. Time and again he emphasized that each of us has the ability to develop an inner strength capable of overcoming any problem. If we concentrate our will we can conquer any fear.

He frequently reminded his listeners, "Never forget: you can smother the hottest flame. It is within your power to do so. Concentrate your energies and you will work miracles." These words brought to mind similar expressions voiced by people from other cultures: "You can vaporize clouds ...," "... walk through walls," "... unhinge doors."

One late afternoon is especially vivid in my memory. A group of teenage boys and girls lounged in an irregular circle on the dirt floor of the patio outside the cantina. Viejo Itza sat in the middle on a wooden chair. The walking stick rested on his knees. People get accustomed to heat in the Yucatán, but this day had been uncommonly sultry. The air was still. Lightning flashed from clouds massed along the horizon. The cantina owner blended a drink of fruits, soda, and ice to cool us off. Even the flies were slowed by the heat; they seemed drowsy, content to linger on the rickety wooden tables.

"Remember," Viejo Itza told his listeners. "It is within you. Here." Gently he lifted the walking stick from his lap and raised it to his heart. "You have the ability to solve your problems." The walking stick pointed to his head. "Each of us knows that we have this." It tapped his temple. "But what is important is the soul within." Back to his heart. "You carry the knowledge in your brains." He pointed the stick at the sky and pulled an imaginary trigger. "But knowledge without the will and without concentration is like a bird without wings." He dropped the stick to the floor and leaned forward.

"Do not let your heart convince you that a problem is overwhelming. When it tells you this, know that it is only testing you. You are Mayan. Think about what your ancestors did. Think back to the pyramid. You are walking along the top of a wall. Ask yourself, as the Maya have always asked: 'How high is this wall? What will happen if I fall? Will I die? Will my leg break?' Most of your walls are close to the ground; falling won't hurt. You may be surprised by this, but there are few life-threatening problems. Our forefathers knew this and built great cities. Imagine the problems they solved! So relax. If you fail—so what? Climb back up and try again." He glanced around at the intent faces.

"In all my long, long life, I have only fallen once so that it really hurt." He patted the lame leg. "And that had nothing to do with a problem. It was an accident. Every problem I have encountered has been a mere step, not even a wall. Oh, some looked very high at first. My heart fluttered. It often tested me. It said, 'Viejo, this problem is a mountain



peak; don't even try to climb.' But I thought of our ancestors and knew my heart was wrong. Or that it was testing me. I have attempted many solutions that failed. When they failed, I fell. The hurt was small. I got back onto the wall and tried a new solution.

"A very wise man once told me that what makes a person wise is his willingness to fail. The difference between a man we respect as successful and the one we call a failure is that the first has failed and tried again when the second has merely failed." He raised a single finger in front of his face. "To this I would add that once you've discovered your wall is low and have decided to attempt a solution to your problem, then give it everything you have within you. We are all capable of accomplishing far more than we realize.

"Concentrate. Study the problem carefully. Map out the solution. Do not deviate. Do not become distracted. Most problems can be solved many different ways. Failure does not always indicate a wrong solution. More often, failure is due to lack of attention. You must concentrate. Look around Uxmal. Think of what concentration was necessary to create all of this!"

The next day Viejo Itza and I were strolling through the Nunnery, a beautiful quadrangle of carved stone buildings in Uxmal whose lines remind me of the Acropolis. I decided to tell him about the similarity between his talk with the teenagers and a seminar I had heard several months earlier in Boston.

The seminar leader was a consultant to large corporations. He was trying to profile traits common to Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers. He told us that CEOs come in all shapes and sizes. Some smoke pipes, some cigars, some cigarettes; others do not smoke. Some drink Scotch, some wine, some beer; others do not drink. Some have nervous habits; others do not. Some are avid readers; others prefer television and verbal presentations. Some are married; others single. Some like to travel; others go to extremes to avoid it.

He had practically given up his search when, one evening, he was invited to a cocktail party attended by many of the CEOs he was studying. As he wandered about, he became aware of a shared trait. At first he thought he was imagining it. But the longer he observed, the more convinced he became. On the spot he devised little experiments to test his hypothesis, and sure enough, each test supported the hypothesis. He had discovered that every CEO at that cocktail party had a rare ability to concentrate. Each one focused complete attention on the matter at hand. Even at such an informal occasion, the CEOs would zero in on the person they were with, apparently shutting out everything else. Their eyes focused on that person rather than roaming about the room. They listened attentively to whoever was speaking and tailored their conversation to that person.

He also noted that each had the ability to refocus very quickly. Concentration might last only as long as a handshake and a few words, then be switched to another person; but it was there and it was complete. It was as though the CEOs had invisible controls that

allowed them to move from one person to the next and from one topic to another; the controls would shut down A, refocus on B and turn up to maximum energy until it was time to shut down B and move on to C.

At the time I attended the seminar, the leader was still researching this matter. He was obviously excited about his findings; he went so far as to tell us that he believed a manager who failed to develop the capability of concentrating on one problem and its solution and then quickly switching to another problem and its solution would never rise to the position of Chief Executive Officer of a major U.S. corporation. "A candidate has to have intelligence and experience," he said. "Many thousands of corporate managers qualify in this arena. What makes the difference is concentration."

When I finished relating this experience to Viejo Itza, he stood for a long moment looking at me. Then he nodded slowly. "Your seminar leader is a wise man."

## CHAPTER 4

# SULAWESI

*“The power of suggestion is strong. Suggestion and faith. Aren’t they what religion is about? In my culture we believe they are the essence of healing. When people have faith, things happen.”*

**Mr. Bendra**

“It was a bat invasion. Right out of a Hitchcock movie.” Sitting across from me in the back of the jeep, Mr. Bendra locked his thumbs together. He fluttered his fingers like wings. They dove at my eyes and suddenly veered away. “Giant bats, hundreds of them blotting out the sun. Wing spans of at least six feet. An invasion.”

“And the bats are still there?”

“Yes, hundreds.”

I shrugged at the now familiar story and for what seemed like the millionth time asked the question he expected: “How come? What keeps them there?”

Playing the charade, he answered me as he had so many times before. “I don’t know. Coexistence I guess. Now the people and bats live in harmony. I’ve never seen the bats in their local habitat, but our driver has.” A new twist; he leaned forward, and spoke rapidly in the local dialect.

The driver laughed and, turning his head toward us, shouted something. Although his voice carried above the sound of the engine, I could not understand him. The language of Sulawesi still eluded me. “He says ‘You’ll know in three hours.’” Mr. Bendra touched my elbow. “Don’t worry. As you see, the driver isn’t afraid.”

Mr. Bendra and I had been almost constant companions for nearly two months. He was a native of Sulawesi, the big Indonesian island east of Borneo. The son of a teacher, he had so excelled in the local schools that he had earned a scholarship to the University of Jakarta and then to Oxford. Although he had the dark skin and eyes and the slight figure of an Indonesian, many of his mannerisms were European. Streaks of gray around the edges of his black hair gave him a maturity beyond his forty years. He had been assigned by a government ministry to assist me in analyzing the economic growth potentials of Sulawesi. Known affectionately as the “Running Giraffe” because of its shape on maps, Sulawesi was the cornerstone of the government’s transmigration program aimed at

moving the urban poor from cities like Jakarta to the underpopulated outer islands.

Our jeep had left the city of Ugung Pandang before dawn. We had raced north along the paved coastal road to the port city of Parepare. Now we were winding cautiously into the mountains of the remote interior. The road was barely more than a dirt path cut through jungle. As I watched the forests slip by outside the open window behind Mr. Bendra, I thought of the many things he had taught me about his land. He had helped me gain insights that I would have thought impossible in such a short period, and he had become a close friend and advisor.

His was a difficult task. Mr. Bendra had known from the beginning that the particular data his ministry had requested for presentation to the United Nations was simply not available in Sulawesi. In the volatile world of government politics, he could have viewed me as the enemy, anticipating that I would return to the capital, throw my hands into the air, and blame failure on the incompetence of local people, in particular himself. I had seen men in his position lose their jobs under similar circumstances and was sure he had witnessed the same. However, he chose to be completely open with me and to approach the task with a sense of humor as well as a commitment to do the best job possible.

“We can’t give them the hard facts they want,” he told me in his Oxford English during our second day together. “But we can give them the soft information they need.”

We had agreed to dispense with much of the traditional research typical of such studies and instead to concentrate on field trips and personal surveys. We interviewed dozens of people representing the various sectors of the economy: agriculture, trade, commerce, banking, shipping, fishing, cottage industries, and the few heavy manufacturers that converted Sulawesi’s natural resources into lumber, paper, and cement. The final phase included visits to remote villages.

Mr. Bendra had begun reciting tales of giant bats several weeks earlier. We had planned our route through the interior and were retracing it on a map when his pencil took a slight detour and stopped on a tiny dot with the name “Pinrang” next to it.

“Batville!” he exclaimed. “We must go there.” Seeing my confusion he placed a hand gently on my shoulder. “You will think what I say is crazy—that’s why we must visit Pinrang together. I’ve heard about them since my boyhood.” He tugged at a strand of gray hair above his ear. “Many years ago I even saw one at a zoo in Bogor. His wings were longer than the reach of my arms. An engineer told me that the bats of Pinrang short out electric wires by falling between two circuits and touching each with their wing tips. The circuits,” he spread his arms wide, “are six feet apart!”

When the jeep pulled into Pinrang, only its driver was prepared for what was to come.

As always upon approaching a village, he downshifted to first gear and pumped the horn with the edge of his palm to clear the street of children. Moments earlier air had fanned our faces through the open windows, but now the afternoon heat was stifling. We

crept forward at a snail's pace.

Children trotted beside us, their shouts and laughter echoing down the street. One boy, bigger than the rest, raced ahead of the jeep. He waved us forward around a corner. Then, as if he knew why we had journeyed so far, he jumped to the side of the road and pointed to a dusty plaza.

At first I saw nothing noteworthy about the plaza. It looked like many others in towns we had visited, a couple of benches and several large trees with huge clusters of dark leaves hanging from their branches. Then suddenly my heart caught in my throat as I realized that some of the leaves were moving in the breathless air; one crawled slowly along a horizontal branch.

The driver pulled to a stop beside the plaza. Mr. Bendra and I sat still. Giant wings hung like black shrouds around the sleeping bodies. I was speechless.

The boy's laughing face bounced in front of the open window. His fingers cupped into a mock camera. He stooped out of sight, only to reappear a few seconds later exhibiting a handful of stones. I found myself being led by the driver out of the jeep to a spot beneath one of the bats. I still could not believe the sight I was seeing. The bat had begun to move above us. Its wings were sluggishly uncoiling. The eyes opened. The huge head turned toward the boy.

Suddenly, as if waking from a dream, I realized that the boy was pelting the bat with stones. I started to protest, but felt a hand grasp my arm. "The only way to stop him is to take pictures." Mr. Bendra released my arm and raised his camera. I followed his example. While I was snapping away, I heard him exclaim, "A shot for Hitchcock!"

The boy screamed. I tore my attention from the bat to look at him. He had dropped his stones and was leaping up and down in front of me. I realized that he was demanding to be included in the pictures. A melee erupted as dozens of other children joined him and vied with one another for positions of prominence. The bat that had been the target of the boy's stones flew sleepily off to roost in another of the plaza's trees.

Mr. Bendra led me up the rickety stairs on the outside of a two-story wooden building next to the plaza. An elderly gentleman in tan slacks and a white jacket waited at the top landing. His jacket was the "Mao" style popularized in the United States during the 1960s and was buttoned up to the collar. His gray hair and nearly perfect teeth contrasted with his dark skin.

Mr. Bendra spoke in the dialect of Sulawesi, then turned to me. "I'd like to introduce you to His Eminence, Mr. Mayor of Pinrang." The old gentleman's grin was warm and friendly. He shook my hand vigorously.

We followed him into the single upstairs room. Like the town itself, it was modest, furnished with a bed at the rear, wobbly table and five primitive chairs in the center, and

a desk with chair at the far end. Behind the desk a window faced the plaza. Through the window my eyes were drawn to the branch of a nearby tree. Crawling slowly along it was a bat whose body was the size of a well-fed cat's. The Mayor caught my eye and spoke, his voice a high sing-song.

Mr. Bendra interpreted: "An expectant mother."

Laughing boisterously, the Mayor pretended to cuddle a baby. He rocked his arms from side to side and spoke to Mr. Bendra.

"He wants you to know that bat babies are really cute."

During the remainder of the two-hour interview, Mr. Bendra and I sat in front of the Mayor's desk. We drank tea and ate fruit. From time to time I took notes as the Mayor patiently described his community and its projects for development. The pregnant bat had crawled out of sight. In the distance, other bats hung sleeping from the plaza's trees. My eyes and thoughts frequently were distracted by their presence. The interview, like most we had conducted, was formal, which struck me as unusually odd, given the presence of the bats.

Finally Mr. Bendra turned to me, closing his notebook with the usual sharp slap that signaled an end to our interview. "Do you have any more questions?"

"Yes. Would the Mayor think it rude if I asked about the bats?"

Mr. Bendra translated. There was a long silence. At last the Mayor spoke. Then both men burst into laughter. Mr. Bendra drew a white handkerchief from his pocket. As he wiped tears from his eyes, he apologized. "I hope you don't take offense, but Mr. Mayor has been waiting all afternoon for you to ask. He suspects you've thought of little else."

Our laughter cleared the atmosphere. The formality seemed to dissipate immediately. The Mayor stood up and stretched. He went to the window. "Bats," he said in English. Then turning back to me, he winked and continued in his language.

"They've been here for as long as anyone's grandparents can remember." Mr. Bendra translated. "What would you like to know?"

"What do you think of them?"

"Oh," the Mayor extended his arms. The sleeves of his jacket slipped up to his elbows, exposing bare flesh. "Very big," he said.

"Yes. Well. Do you ever wish they would go away?"

"Ah, perhaps you have heard then? Once we tried to rid this town of their presence. A doctor from Jakarta journeyed here to observe them. After several weeks he informed us

they were causing health problems. He said they are dirty animals. They should not be allowed to live in our town. About the time he left, people got sick. All kinds of symptoms. They vomited. Had headaches and diarrhea.

“I personally traveled all the way to Jakarta to petition the government for help. They sent out the experts. Men with long titles told us many different things. ‘Yes,’ they said, ‘you must rid yourselves of these creatures.’ Some recommended traps. Others poison and guns. I assembled a village meeting.

“A funny thing happened when we all got together. One man said the bats had been here longer than people. Someone pointed out that messing with God’s creatures is a mistake. An old healer, who had taken care of our sick since before we ever saw a government doctor, stood up. He said that the doctor, not the bats, caused the sickness. After all, the sickness had never occurred until the doctor came. How could the bats who have been with us forever be to blame? We all finally agreed that the doctor and perhaps the others who had come afterwards probably had cast a spell.

“So we sent them away. Everyone. The sickness left too. It has not returned.”

“The bats don’t cause any problems?”

“No. They flyaway every evening and eat fruit far out of town. They return mornings. Never touch our fruit.”

Mr. Bendra and I talked a great deal about bats during the remainder of our trip through the interior. They—and the Mayor of Pinrang—left a lasting impression. We agreed that, in the strictest sense, the doctor had not cast a spell. However, as Mr. Bendra put it, “The power of suggestion is strong. Suggestion and faith. Aren’t they what religion is about? In my culture we believe they are the essence of healing. When people have faith, things happen. When they believe they should be sick, they get sick. If they are convinced someone has cast a spell, they must do whatever it takes to destroy the spell! I guess I was wrong about one thing though.”

“What’s that?”

“The bats lived in Pinrang before the village existed, before there were people in this part of Sulawesi.” He locked his thumbs together and fluttered his fingers like wings. They dove at my face. “There was never a bat invasion.”

## CHAPTER 5

# THE ANDES

*“Faith is like the mortar holding a wall together. You don’t need to believe in my religion to understand this. Rituals mean little, unless they help open the heart. That is important. Open your heart. Listen to it and follow its commands. Have faith in what your heart says. Without the mortar of faith, even the sturdiest wall will collapse.”*

**Don José Quischpe**

“They are men who fly by strapping condor wings to their arms.” The old Quechua Indian lady looked up from the straw hat she was weaving. “I know. I have seen them myself.”

“It is done through meditation,” said an anthropology student at the University of Cuenca, Ecuador. “They have perfected the ancient art of levitation—like Tibetan Buddhists.”

Both were describing a ceremony performed in a Quechua village high in the Ecuadorian Andes. The ceremony is reputed to predate Manco Capac, the first of the long line of Incas who ruled the vast Empire stretching from present day Colombia through Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and into Chile.

The city of Cuenca was founded by Spanish conquistadors in the 1550s. At an altitude of over eight thousand feet, it is nestled in a valley formed by the Tomebamba River during its journey from the high Andes to the Amazon. Not far away are the ruins of Ingapirca. Part of the intricate network of fortifications stretching the three-thousand-mile length of the Incan Highway of the Sun, Ingapirca, like many of the Indian villages around Cuenca, is shrouded in the mists of history.

I had heard stories about the “Birdmen of the Andes” often during the year I had lived in Cuenca. But until now, it had all been rumor. I had begun to believe that the “Birdmen” were a myth. No one would disclose the location of their village.

“It is faith. That is the key,” Joselito Jesús Quischpe told me on the several occasions when I pressed him. “You should not question faith.” Don José (as he was known to his friends) was the manager of a Quechua brickmakers’ cooperative in Cuenca. My job was to help the co-op implement sound management practices and to develop markets for its bricks among the construction companies owned by Ecuador’s *buena gente*, upper class.



Centuries of distrust and outright antagonism characterize the relationship between the Quechua and *buena gente*. For me the conflict between these two cultures was the source of constant frustration: *buena gente* contractors refused to buy directly from Quechua brickmakers. Thus, the two goals of my work were to teach management to Don José, and to act as a bridge between the co-op and the *buena gente*.

It is one of the many ironies of Ecuador's dualistic society that I had been assigned to this job at the request of an Ecuadorian government agency that was managed by members of the *buena gente*. The Center for Economic Development was charged with the responsibility of integrating the Quechua into the mainstream economic development of the nation. The Center was managed by some of Cuenca's most astute politicians and executives. It was a prestigious organization and served as a stepping stone for the very ambitious. Unfortunately, the Center had great difficulty locating and hiring qualified Ecuadorians who were willing to work directly with the Quechua. At least a partial solution was found in the U.S. Peace Corps. The Center saw the Peace Corps as a source of enthusiastic and reasonably talented people who could hob nob with the *buena gente* and then march off to Quechua villages, roll up their sleeves, and go to work.

I had been a Peace Corps volunteer stationed in the Amazon region of Ecuador for six months trying to figure out a way of applying my speciality—management (or more precisely, in Peace Corps jargon: Organization, Development, and Management of Production and Marketing Cooperatives)—to an economic system that was based on slash-and-burn agriculture and barter. I had also been trying desperately to cope with the skin infections, insect bites, and digestive problems that are likely to plague the uninitiated in the rain forest. I was delighted to accept the Center's summons to the mountains.

During the first months, Don José and I had worked diligently to teach each other as much as we could about what we each knew. I had to learn about the tasks of producing, classifying, transporting, and selling bricks. Don José required a great deal of instruction in accounting and basic management techniques. Although Don José became proficient at bookkeeping and inventory control, I had so far failed to obtain a single contract: we had not sold one brick to a major project during the entire twelve-month period. Co-op members subsisted on small-lot sales to home-builders and lower-class merchants who bought on an "as-needed" basis.

"It will come," Don José advised. "Be patient and trust in God." "Like me," he could have added, for his example was inspirational. All his life he had been a brickmaker in Sinincay, a Quechua village an hour by truck over some of the world's roughest roads into the mountains west of Cuenca. Like his neighbors, he owned a clay pit. His youngest son had dug out the clay. Older brothers had cut eucalyptus to fuel the oven. His wife and daughters had molded bricks and laid them out in long rows on the hard earth. After sun-drying, the bricks were hauled on the backs of Don José and his brothers to the top of the oven and then handed down, bucket-brigade fashion, to be stacked inside. When the firing process was completed, the bricks were loaded into rickety trucks.

The families of Sinincay delivered their bricks to warehouses in Cuenca. Warehouse owners grew rich by buying cheap and selling at huge margins to final users. These included architects and engineers, the brothers, cousins, and uncles of the warehouse owners, or the next best thing, brothers in the *buena gente* fraternity. The system benefited everyone except those whose hard work fabricated the bricks.

Sinincay is typical of the modern Quechua community. Its residents happen to produce bricks while those in other villages weave straw hats and baskets, harvest potatoes, raise pigs, make pottery, lug heavy cargos strapped to their backs, or are indentured to serve on *haciendas*. All share these characteristics: their first language is Quechua; they are poor; they are exploited; they are excluded from most economic sectors and virtually all social circles outside their own; they are plagued by disease, hunger, and high infant mortality rates; and, although they pay lip service to the Catholic Church, their deep faith is grounded in traditions that predate the Spanish conquest.

“We have always lived as we do today,” Don José confided. “I am Quechua first. Why pretend otherwise? I don’t care which *blanco* [person of Spanish descent] rules. Democracy, dictator, military junta: they are all equal. We want only two things: that our children are raised as Quechua and that we continue to obey our own God.”

Throughout the Andes the Quechua cling to their ancient religion. In colonial times, Catholicism was forced on them through torture. Today, the church claims that Ecuador is 95% Catholic; but it is well known that the Quechua have simply mollified the church. They have incorporated church trappings into their own rituals. In Andean towns, after sharing communion, the Indian congregation frequently hustles outside to participate in its own rituals held in the plaza below the steps to the church.

“Money means nothing to us,” Don José told me. “Atahualpa, our Lord Inca, had fabulous riches. But because of his faith he gave them all to Pizarro. Ah, you hadn’t heard this before? I am surprised.

“After Atahualpa killed his brother, Huascar, God was angry. ‘You have betrayed a sacred trust, Atahualpa. You and your people must be taught a lesson. The Quechua have drunk so much blood that they are like animals in the jungle. You have not listened to the ancestors.’

” ‘Soon, men wearing suits of sunlight will invade your kingdom. Do not fight them. Follow their orders. The Quechua must serve these men. This is not simply to punish the Quechua. Your people have much to learn, Atahualpa.’ The Inca promised to obey God. Before his death he spread the word throughout the realm: the Quechua must always follow the ancestors’ commands.”

Don José had built his brickmaking facility into one of the most productive in Sinincay. Then his clay dried up. The land that his father had mined and his father before him would no longer support a brickmaker. The soil was worthless for agriculture. Don

José had few options. He could sign himself into virtual servitude to one of the other brickmakers—all of whom could coax barely enough out of the clay to feed their own families and would have little to offer an employee. Or he could leave and seek work as a cargo hauler or beggar in Cuenca. Then a third option presented itself. When he related this to me, his dark eyes grew misty. “It was a miracle in disguise.” He bowed his head and refused to say more than that he had been told to form a brick makers’ co-op. He had convinced the owner of a vacant lot in Cuenca to rent him the site for use as a warehouse. Five families had delivered their bricks to his lot. “The rest you know.”

I often wondered how Don José and the five families had survived the early months. The warehouse owner demanded his rent on the first of the month. Whenever they moved a load of bricks from Sinincay to Cuenca, the brickmakers had to pay for the truck and driver in advance. They had to purchase food for their own families. And sales were slow. Until I arrived, there was only the crudest attempt at bookkeeping, but from what I saw and the stories I heard, I knew that close to a dozen truckloads had swelled the inventory of the warehouse before one truckload had been sold—and that one to many buyers who trickled in from time to time and lugged their purchases away in wooden wheelbarrows, old carts, and gunny sacks.

The co-op had existed seven months when the Center for Economic Development contacted me. By that time, Don José had learned to keep his inventory under control. The five families sold to other middlemen, providing only enough bricks to their co-op to satisfy its immediate demand. This helped them earn income, but it did not facilitate co-op growth. Don José was living on roughly one-third of what he had earned back when his clay mines were productive.

The members at first were very suspicious of my motives. They had never heard of the Peace Corps and knew little about the Center for Economic Development. What was I gaining? How was I paid? One day, while riding on top of a load of bricks being trucked down a winding mountain road, a small group gathered around me. What was the name of my god, they wanted to know. And when would I expect them to convert?

Two of the families took every possible opportunity to assure me that there was no gold on their property and that if I succeeded in taking land from them, I could expect little reward—only the hard work of a brickmaker!

Needless to say, I worked diligently to dispel their fears. I attended their *fiestas*, ate and got drunk with them. Several times each month I borrowed films from the Cuenca U.S. Information Agency office, along with a jeep, projector, and generator from the Peace Corps, and showed films outdoors against the side of a Sinincay adobe house. Sometimes the turnout amazed me. The yard filled with hundreds of men, women, and children; many had walked through the cold Andean night for over an hour to see *Teatro Gringo* for thirty to sixty minutes. Their favorite films were a documentary about the first moon landing and a World Championship playoff game between the Boston Celtics and Los Angeles Lakers. The U.S.I.A. film library was limited; we must have watched those two films a dozen times each during my first year with the co-op.

Don José became my ally. He was the closest to me and was the first to understand that I had something to contribute; he knew that I was taking nothing from the co-op in return. Occasionally we visited other projects where the Center for Economic Development or the Peace Corps were involved. As he taught me about his world, he began to comprehend mine. We shared a common trait that helped to seal the bond between us: circumstances had placed each of us in a foreign culture. Cuenca and its *buena gente* previously had been as unknown to him as the Quechua had been to me. His growing faith spread to the others. They knew and trusted him, and I could see that as his trust in me grew, so too did membership in the co-op. During the tenth month after my arrival, we welcomed in our tenth family.

Every month the members of the co-op met in Sinincay. For eleven months I stood before their meetings and summarized the progress I was making. I listed the names of the *buena gente* with whom I had met; I outlined my strategy for the following month. But as the year grew shorter, my confidence diminished. It was common knowledge that the *buena gente* would not negotiate with a Quechua. As a *gringo*, I had thought I could surmount this obstacle. The fact was, I had been admitted to *buena gente* social circles. I sipped coffee at sidewalk cafes with Cuenca's elite. I was invited to their lavish parties. I tutored their children in English. I wrote recommendations to U.S. universities. But I signed no contracts. At the twelfth co-op meeting I felt sick at heart. I stood up and apologized. I had lived the good life in Cuenca while these people had slaved in their clay pits and primitive ovens. And I had failed them.

After that meeting, Don José led me outside. Together we walked to the top of a knoll and looked down on Sinincay's dusty plaza. We watched as a little girl struggled to raise a bundle of wood to her back. She tied the leather thongs around her shoulders, then shuffled off toward the distant mountains we could see far on the other side of the Tomebamba valley. A tiny spire in the hazy distance between the little girl and the mountains was the only sign of Cuenca and its Catholic churches.

Don José placed a hand on my shoulder. "You must have faith," he said. "At the meeting you were hard on yourself."

"I haven't much time. You always say I should be patient. Well, as you know my days here grow short."

The hand on my shoulder turned me slowly to face him. "I never told you this before," he said, "but it was at the ceremony of the Birdmen that the ancestors commanded me to start the cooperative. There will be a ceremony next week. Will you please join me this time?"

"Faith is like the mortar holding a wall together." Don José's words seemed to take on renewed vigor with every mile we drove into the dark mountains. "You don't need to believe in my religion to understand this. Rituals mean little, unless they help open the heart. That is important. Open your heart. Listen to it and follow its commands. Have

faith in what your heart says. Without the mortar of faith, even the sturdiest wall will collapse.”

We had left before dawn, headed for a town more than two hours further into the Andes than Sinincay. I drove a borrowed jeep over roads that sometimes were marked only by horse droppings. Hail slashed against the windshield. Occasionally our headlights exposed an Indian hut or a pack of mangy dogs. Don José shared the seat next to me with two children. In the back were his wife and another co-op member, that member’s wife, and three children. Few words were spoken, except for exchanges between Don José and me on the subject of faith. He had shrugged off most of my questions relating to how it was possible for men to fly with responses like “You will see soon enough” and “It is faith.”

The air not only was cold; it was thin. The altitude was higher than anything I had experienced. I began to feel lightheaded. “Can the Birdmen fly only in villages this high up?”

Without looking away from the road, I could feel his eyes. “That has nothing to do with it. You really don’t understand, do you? Flying is not physical; it is spiritual. I can’t tell you about it. You have to experience it. Your experience may be different from mine. Remember this as you watch. When the Birdmen fly, it is to seek advice from dead ancestors. Atahualpa decreed: we must obey God’s commands as related through our ancestors. These things are not to be understood, only felt. Perhaps you will feel them as we do. Who knows?”

When we pulled into the village I could see from my watch that the sun should have risen. Yet the morning was dark. The hail had turned to a cold drizzle; fog blanketed the dirt plaza. Occasionally, huts appeared, like ghosts, through the fog.

Don José pointed to one of the huts. It was next to the plaza and slightly larger than its neighbors. I parked the jeep in front of it. A crude cross was painted in red above the door. As I turned off the engine I became aware of the dancers.

First I heard the slow beating of a drum. Then the shrill notes of bamboo flutes. I stepped from the jeep into the rain. They materialized out of the fog. Their huge wings flapped in rhythm with the drum, faces hidden by furry masks. The Birdmen. Dressed in skins and feathers—foxes, deer, and condors—they danced in an undulating circle. Their heads swiveled from side to side; above the eye-slits in their masks were the faces of animals whose mouths were agape as though frozen in a moment of inexplicable horror.

The Birdmen danced around two poles crossed on the ground. From time to time one of them would shriek—the sound of an enraged eagle—and breaking from the circle, rush the cross. At the last moment he would spread his wings to their full extent and leaping would glide high above the poles to land on the ground opposite and rejoin the circle.

The primitive music of drum and flute, the dancers, the very fog itself mesmerized me.

I lost all sense of time. I spoke to no one.

A breeze slowly swept the fog from the plaza. Several dozen Indians were standing outside the circle. Huddled beneath somber ponchos, they too seemed lost in the world of the dancers.

When I glanced at my watch I was surprised to see that I had been transfixed by this ceremony for nearly two hours. None of the dancers had rested. Their stamina was amazing. This and the energy of their flights across the poles convinced me that I was witnessing an event that transcended normal human abilities.

At last, the rhythm of the drum slowed. The dancers' wings dropped. Their bodies bent forward. The wings dragged along the ground making a rustling noise that could be heard between drum beats. One by one, they spun away from the circle into the crowd of onlookers. They were enveloped by men offering ponchos and bottles of *trago*—cane alcohol. While the ponchos were being wrapped around them, they drank long pulls from the bottles.

Don José ushered me inside a thatched-roof hut where his family and those of other co-op members joined a group from the village. A *trago* bottle was passed around. The rain grew violent and we spent the rest of our stay inside the hut drinking and sharing food prepared by the local families.

It was not until the long drive back to Sinincay that I had the opportunity to talk with Don José. Uncharacteristically, he had drunk so much *trago* that it showed. His speech was slurred. He seemed surly and withdrawn. When I inquired as to whether any messages had been received from dead ancestors, he answered tersely, "Of course. Many messages." He raised a bottle from under his poncho and saluted me. "But only one for our little cooperative." He paused to gulp rapidly. "Soon you shall sign a big contract. Then we must work very hard to satisfy it." He nudged my elbow with the bottle and belched. "Very, very hard."

About two weeks after the Birdmen ceremony I was stopped on the street by a tall, blond man. I had seen him before from a distance. Although he was well over six feet tall, he had always been accompanied by several Ecuadorians. I had assumed he was a native, born perhaps to German emigrants, and was surprised when he spoke to me in English laced with a decidedly non-Spanish accent. "You're the *gringo* who works with the brickmakers' co-op?" he asked.

I told him I was. We shook hands. "Congratulations," he said. "What you are doing is admirable."

He explained that he was a Lutheran missionary from Norway. A member of his congregation had told him about the co-op. He invited me to lunch at the Hotel Crespo. As we ate, he outlined plans for building a school that would offer an alternative to the traditional Catholic-oriented education. "Cuenca has a couple of pretty good schools."

He winked. “But we think ours will provide a little something extra.

“It will also be very different architecturally. Each room will be in a separate octagonal-shaped building. The walls will be brick. Ours will be the only structure in Cuenca where the bricks actually show. We won’t cover them with adobe. It will be a real showpiece!

“You know better than I that this creates a problem since all bricks produced within hundreds of miles of here are fired in crude ovens. Most of these bricks are unacceptable. They are weak, cracked, and unattractive. O.K. when covered with adobe. But for what we have in mind? No. So you see my dilemma? Only those bricks produced nearest the firebox will be acceptable to us, only the hardest and reddest. We can use nothing but the best.

“My proposition to you is straightforward. We will buy all our bricks from your co-op—probably more than you sold the entire last year—and we will pay triple the normal price. In exchange you must guarantee to deliver only the very best to us. From each truck that comes in we will expect to accept just a portion. The rest you must take away. They are yours to do with as you please. We want no part of them. And you must work with our engineer to establish a delivery schedule. We have no room for stockpiling. Yet we cannot delay construction while waiting for you to deliver. Drunk brickmakers, heavy rains—all those problems will be yours.

“One more thing I should mention. My engineer’s name is Gomez. You have heard of him? Good. Then you know he is the best in Cuenca. He constructs the biggest buildings in this city. He is highly skeptical of our plans and constantly reminds me that Cuenca is not Oslo or Madrid. However, he promises that if I am successful he will use your brickmakers for his other projects.”

I walked away from the Hotel Crespo feeling overwhelmed with emotions. I was ecstatic and I was scared. What the Norwegian had suggested was unheard of among Andean brickmakers: both the opportunities and the obstacles to meeting his terms. I went directly to the co-op’s warehouse.

Looking back, I can say that the remainder of my time in Cuenca gave me an education in the miracles of faith. I stayed on for another year. Despite what seemed like insurmountable problems, the members of the Sinincay co-op rose to every occasion. The Lutheran school was constructed with co-op bricks and it was indeed a showpiece. Engineer Gomez was true to his word; he contracted with us to supply bricks for a ten-story building, the largest in Cuenca. Don José took over my role. Although he was not invited into *buena gente* social circles, by the time I left he was treated as an equal in negotiating brick sales. He sat down with *buena gente* architects, engineers, and contractors. Together they worked out quality-control plans and schedules.

Sinincay built itself a school. Small and simple, it was constructed by the co-op members themselves of crude bricks and adobe; it was not octagonal, but it was the first

to grace their community. Co-op membership grew. Money was budgeted to pay a teacher. Co-op families painted their houses, purchased transistor radios and bicycles. During the month before my departure, a committee appointed by the co-op began meetings with Cuenca's power company to discuss the construction of a small hydroelectric plant at a site near Sinincay.

The miracle was not that the Birdmen had foretold the coming of the Norwegian Lutheran. Nor that a contract had been signed. The miracle was that the Sinincay co-op members adjusted so quickly and so successfully to the requirements imposed on them. They developed a schedule for producing and delivering bricks, for culling out only the best and setting the others aside for less-demanding buyers. These tasks had never before been performed by Quechua brickmakers—at least not in the memory of the oldest Sinincay resident. The members applied themselves to these and other aspects of their work with diligence and, except for a few minor errors, they succeeded. In essence, they changed their work ethic. They revolutionized a system of doing business that had become ingrained over hundreds of years. It was a miracle of faith. They believed that God had spoken through their ancestors. Atahualpa's demand was obeyed.

During our last moments together, Don José and I shared a *trago* under the roof of the warehouse shack, at that same table where we had spent so many hours learning the co-op business together. Then he rose and gave me a big *abrazo*, hug.

"How can we ever thank you?" He removed his straw hat and placed it over his heart. "You have done so much for us. Most of all, you have taught us how to go on from here. And for me personally ... I don't know where to begin. But you already understand. Words are unnecessary."

For my part, words were impossibly inadequate. I reminded him of the advice he had given as we drove into the mountains to see the Birdmen. "These things are not to be understood, Don José, only felt."

"Yes." His eyes twinkled. "And I feel them now."

"So do I."

I did then and I do now. The feelings come back often, as does the memory of my Quechua education. Whenever there is a difficult job to be done, I remember the Sinincay brickmakers. I think of the odds against them and the obstacles they had to surmount. Their obstacles were physical; and they were emotional and cultural as well. They overcame them; they conquered adversity through spiritual strength. Don José said it many times in different ways: the form of your faith is not important; what is important is that you have faith. Time and experience have proven the truth of this.



## CHAPTER 6

# THE STRESS-FREE HABIT

### THE FIVE ELEMENTS

The people described in the preceding chapters are fortunate. Techniques for managing stress are built into their cultures.

Time spent with them and others in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East taught me that I was severely crippled because my culture did not provide comparable techniques. At first I was reluctant to fully embrace the lessons I had learned, and I did not discuss them with others. But eventually I did begin to research the principles in earnest. And what I discovered was eye-opening.

Throughout the country research was booming; some was devoted to mind-body issues. Respected scientists were hacking away at the barriers that had been erected by their predecessors between psyche and soma. Venerable institutions like Harvard Medical School were concluding that through meditation a person could control systems that previously had been classified as “involuntary.” Biofeedback had become chic. Nixon’s trip to China opened new doors; acupuncture was suddenly taken seriously. I found that people sought me out at cocktail parties; they delighted in hearing stories about foreign lands, customs, and especially the way other cultures responded to technology and its side effects—including stress. And I had concluded from personal observation that many successful U.S. executives shared traits in common with Toyup, Viejo Itza, and Don José. Concentration, faith, the ability to define problems in goal-oriented terms, to attempt solutions, and to stay cool under fire (thus minimizing the harmful physical effects of stress): these all seemed to be plusses for the person climbing the corporate ladder.

Many years have elapsed since those informal observations. Mind-body research has become big business. Meditation, visualization, hypnosis, and yoga are used in many medical programs, at hospitals, and in rehabilitation centers. Science can describe the impact of stress on our bodies, from the point where it causes the brain to activate chemicals, to the obstructed artery that ultimately results in death. Links between stress and problems such as depression and lack of immunity to disease have been established. Management consultants have found themselves replaced in many corporations by motivational experts. The need to control the harmful effects of stress is recognized throughout our culture. We have proven to ourselves that age-old, “primitive” techniques do work. We have also learned that those who are able to manage stress effectively are likely to be healthier, happier, and more productive than those who do not. Nevertheless, our culture still is a long way from providing us with daily routines for accomplishing this.

We do not share the good fortune of the people described in the preceding chapters when it comes to stress control. Toyup, Viejo Itza, the people of Pinrang, and the brickmakers may lack many of the benefits offered by our technological society; however, in the realm of stress, they have the advantage. Let us briefly review their situations.

Toyup's Javanese myths combine aspects of Zen and Hinduism. They provide encouragement and guidance for dealing with stressful 'situations. O-Nami is but one of many stories that are told by the Javanese during times of stress. Understand what you are; then be it. Know what you want; attain it now. Don't try to become; be. Toyup lives his life according to these teachings. He did not need to devise them; they are a part of him. All he has to do is listen, understand, and emulate his parents, his peers, and his neighbors.

Viejo Itza molded a personal tragedy into a vehicle for teaching. He uses the example of his fall from the pyramid to illustrate a stress-control philosophy and instill it in others. The philosophy is rooted in his culture. The idea of "walking the wall" is an ancient one. It came to Viejo Itza in legends passed down through generations from the time when Uxmal was an active city. The problem is not that you have a problem. The problem is that you do not believe you can find a solution. Most of our problems are not as serious as we at first suspect. We all have the power to solve them. We must put them into perspective and make an attempt. If we fail, we try again. We should not be afraid of making mistakes. Viejo Itza exploits the very graphic example of his fall from the pyramid to pass on to new generations the tradition of old Mayan teachings.

The people of Pinrang did not have a bat problem until a foreign expert told them they had a problem. A doctor from Jakarta, on the Island of Java, is as much a foreigner to the highlanders of Sulawesi as is a man from another nation (the islands of present-day Indonesia were not united as a nation until World War II). The doctor's message caused stress throughout the village. It is not surprising that he found abnormally high blood pressure and metabolic rates among his patients. Then the people turned to their own traditions. They resorted to an ancient custom that dictates that problems should be brought out in the open and discussed at community meetings. This process exposed the fact that sickness had not struck them until after the doctor's arrival. Perhaps he, not the bats, was the cause. This line of thought suggested a solution: the people of Pinrang concluded that they did not need additional help from outside authorities—the solution lay within. They should expel the doctor and all he represented. Once they reconfirmed their relationship to nature and God and clarified for themselves their sense of self identity, the sickness vanished.

The Sinicay co-op was confronted with a problem stemming from racial biases and business practices. The solution had to include radical changes in co-op members' work habits. In a society as tradition-bound as that of the Quechua, such changes do not come easily. Had a government agency or even a trusted friend attempted to implement these changes, the results would have been either disastrous or negligible: co-op members

might have rebelled or simply ignored such attempts, depending on their perceptions of the consequences. Either response would have resulted in severe stress. However, the impetus for a solution came through an ingrained cultural force, a religious message that was supported by unquestioning faith. The voice of Atahualpa spoke to the co-op families through long-dead ancestors. They obeyed. No decision was required. Only hard work.

Faith was important to all these people. Toyup's faith bridged many cultures and was rooted in the traditions of those cultures; above all else, he had faith in himself and his ability to be what he saw as the best in himself. Viejo Itza believed in the Mayan religion and in the ability to find solutions by reducing problems to their least-threatening level. The people of Pinrang rejected a technology-oriented faith in modern medicine and turned instead to their traditional beliefs. The brickmakers found salvation through their faith, a faith so strong that they were willing to alter their lives significantly in order to comply with a mandate from ancestors.

The importance of concentration was a theme that ran throughout most of Viejo Itza's discussions. Concentration was the key to Toyup's meditational techniques, as it is for most meditations. The Birdmen provide a fascinating example of a type of ritualized concentration that is sometimes facilitated by drugs or alcohol; their trance-like state is not unlike those entered by shamans in the Amazon and Borneo and by Sufis—in all these cases, physical and mental energies are concentrated on achieving a spiritual state that may be viewed as “enlightenment.”

All of us come from backgrounds where stress control was once a part of our cultures. We need only go back far enough in time to discover these roots. For some, they still exist. Many people—like Toyup, Itza, the Mayor, and Quischpe—live in societies where stress control is a part of life routines. This is true for those living in certain communities in the United States and Europe and for those who faithfully practice some religions. Others can look to the time of their parents. Many of us must go back several generations. Unfortunately, an increasing number of people who live in regions where such roots are still meaningful—Java, the Yucatan, Sulawesi, and the Andes, to name a few—have lost touch with these roots, or are fast forgetting about them in their rush to gain the fruits of the technological world.

What our cultures do not offer, we must find for ourselves. We have seen that stress can be a very serious problem. It can result in physical sickness and emotional disturbances. It may be the cause of heart attack and stroke. If we fail to control it, stress can kill. Practicing the stress-free habit on a regular basis provides a remedy.

Can we, in fact, be stress-free? To the extent that stressful situations, like bacteria, will always be near at hand, the answer is no. However, people who practice the stress-free habit, like ones who keep bacteria at bay through good health techniques, can mitigate the effects of stress. This can be accomplished to the point where, for all practical purposes, they are free of the crippling aspects of stress.

The five elements of the stress-free habit were outlined in Chapter 1. These are:

1. Be who you wish to be.
2. Balance the problem-solution issue.
3. Concentrate.
4. Have faith.
5. Meditate.

Toyup, Itza, the Mayor, and Don José Quischpe should have helped to clarify the first four of these five elements. Each of us will benefit if we strive to make these an integral part of our lives.

## **Be**

Try to think frequently about being the person who represents the values you prize most highly. Whenever you find yourself contemplating the idea of *becoming*, stop and repeat the phrase, “I do not need to *become*, I will *be* this person beginning right now.” Know that the only obstacle preventing you from *being* is the idea of *becoming*.

How many times do we hear people ask, “What do you want to become?” Or the lament, “If only I could do so and so, I would be a such and such.” Learn to put all those types of thoughts aside. Think about the person in you that is what you most highly value. *Be* that person to the fullest extent.

A friend used to tell me that she wanted to be a writer. In fact she wrote a great deal, but she did so with the idea of *becoming* a writer. Her writing was self-conscious. It was directed toward becoming something; thus it was not really a reflection of her, but rather an attempt at conforming to a preconceived idea of what a writer’s work should be. This caused stress, and the stress tended to make the writing even more self-conscious. After practicing the stress-free habit, she realized that she was a writer. The more she fully understood and believed this, the less stress she experienced, and the more her writing improved.

Our society places great emphasis on obtaining things. These include material objects

such as money, clothes, homes, and cars. Also included are the nonmaterial: membership in clubs, education, titles, and all manner of accolades. The obtaining process often takes time; it may require patience and careful planning. Patience and the ability to plan are admirable qualities. However, while you are planning and exercising patience, do not make the mistake of waiting to become. Be a part of the process. Education does not happen when one obtains a diploma; champions are not made by one game alone; a person does not become a writer on the day a publisher accepts the manuscript.

## **Solve the Problem**

Whenever problems arise, concentrate on solutions. It is folly to lament the fact that you have a problem. What you must do is decide on a solution and try it.

Think of the problem as a stone wall. How high is it? Three feet? One foot? One inch? If you fail to find a solution, how far will you fall? What consequences will you have to face?

Whittle the height of the wall down to its proper level. Examine it carefully. Be realistic. Do not allow a faint heart to exaggerate the height. As Viejo Itza pointed out, the heart often tries to test us by telling us that a problem is overwhelming.

An executive who sought my advice was confronted with an important decision. He believed that a wrong decision would cost him his job. Like so many of us, during this time of crisis he had a tendency to emphasize the negative. His first line of thinking went something like the following: if I get fired, I won't be able to pay the mortgage; I'll lose my house; my wife will divorce me; the courts will award custody of our two children to her; my life will be a shambles. When he thought like this, the wall was very high. Stress became a factor that threatened to impede his decision-making abilities.

While we talked, a different perspective began to emerge. It became obvious that the executive's job had become less than satisfying to him. His wife sensed this and, in fact, had encouraged him to explore other opportunities. She often mentioned a desire to move to a warmer climate. Deep down, he felt confident that his credentials were sufficient to land him a better job—perhaps in a southern city. As he and I chatted, the height of the wall shrank considerably.

The executive realized that he still did not want to make a wrong decision. If he was going to leave his employer, he desired to do so on his terms. Certainly it was not in his best interests to be fired. However, by placing the issue in proper perspective he was now better able to work toward a solution. In fact, he realized that there were several decisions, which, if they proved wrong, would leave him options to try again. At this point, the wall was only a few inches from the ground. A highly stressful situation had become practically stress-free. Now it was merely a matter of choosing one of the decisions and testing it.

## **Concentrate**

Concentration should become an integral part of your life. All of us can continually improve in this regard. So much has been written about the importance of concentration that I need only refer to it here. We all know its powers. We have experienced them at school, on the job, and in doing tasks around the house.

Whatever you do, put everything into it. If you decide to be lazy, *be* lazy, concentrate on your laziness. When you relax, really relax. When you talk with someone, concentrate on that person and the conversation you are having. Concentration should be maximized at all times: in repairing a bicycle, smelling a flower, waxing the floor.

Hand-in-hand with concentration goes compartmentalization. Your life is compartmentalized. You might as well recognize this and use it to your advantage. There are sleeping compartments, working compartments, eating compartments, playing compartments, and so on. When you move from one to another, do so completely. Do not carry baggage from the first to the second. When you work, daydreams should not intrude. When you leave work, leave it completely and focus on the next compartment: play, a hobby, shopping, or your family.

Remember, however, that you do exercise control over how compartments are defined. There is no reason why you cannot set up a work compartment between two at-home play compartments if you so desire. Many executives bring work home in briefcases. What is important is that a conscious decision is made to drop the play (or whatever), open the briefcase and concentrate on its contents; when the briefcase is closed, forget about it. Conversely, you should feel free to set up daydream or play compartments at work (recognizing that, if these are not consistent with the boss's ideas, you may have to pay the consequences!). If you do so, during these moments concentrate completely on your daydreams or play; do not let thoughts of work intrude.

We should continually endeavor to improve our abilities to unfocus and refocus concentration. Like the Fortune 500 executives, we are best served when we can move quickly and completely from one subject to another. The same is true for compartmentalization.

## **Have Faith**

The fourth element is faith. It is a potent force and an essential one in the process of reducing stress. Each of the people described in the preceding chapters believed very strongly in his own faith.

For Toyup to achieve his goals he had to have faith in the legends he had been taught. Viejo Itza believed in the traditions handed down from early Mayan times. Don José and the other co-op members obeyed the command of Atahualpa; they believed without question that his command was communicated to the Birdmen dancers through dead ancestors. The people of Pinrang rejected the recommendations of modern experts and relied instead on their faith in their own intuition, God, and their historical relationship

with nature.

The particular characteristics of your faith are unimportant as far as the stress-free habit is concerned. However, it is very important that you have faith. Believe in yourself. Believe in the religion of your choice (if you choose one at all). Believe in an idea or goal. Believe that you can conquer stress through the stress-free habit.

## **Meditate**

The fifth element—meditation—offers a vehicle for bringing the other four into perspective on a regular and orderly basis. Meditation is at the heart of the routine practice of the stress-free habit. It is also one of the best tools available for helping us learn to concentrate.

Meditation can take many forms. There are numerous ways to meditate. Some are entirely “mental,” requiring that the body remain inactive, while others are “physical,” based on movement. Certain dancers and practitioners of the martial arts meditate as they exercise. Religious rituals sometimes take on aspects of meditation. Prayer may be meditation. There are “structured” and “unstructured” meditations and “inner,” “outer,” and “middle” forms.

In Chapter 1, I cited several studies conducted at the Harvard Medical School, Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and other institutions that have shown that meditation has positive effects on our biological systems. Research has scientifically established that when practiced regularly, meditation can cause significantly beneficial reductions in blood pressure, oxygen consumption, metabolic and heart rates, and blood lactates, while inducing alpha brain waves (related to states of tranquillity and well-being). Meditation can be instrumental in the treatment of circulatory, respiratory, and nervous disorders and has been successfully used as a substitute for powerful chemical tranquilizers. The meditation technique employed during most of these studies is of the “mantra” type as described below. Researchers generally agree that many techniques result in similar benefits. The two important aspects are relaxation and concentration.

To practice the stress-free habit, it is not necessary that you learn any more than one simple technique. However, if you are interested in pursuing the subject, I certainly encourage you to study others. Several of the books listed in the bibliography are excellent guides.

Unless you already know a way or ways to meditate that serve you well, I suggest either one (or both) of the techniques used by Toyup. These are practiced by people throughout the world. They are not oriented toward any specific religion or culture.

The first—often called “mantra meditation”—is perhaps the most widely used form. Its goal is total muscle relaxation accompanied by mental concentration on one thing and one thing alone: a word, phrase, or chant repeated over and over again.

There are conflicting views regarding the importance of the word, phrase, or chant (the “mantra”). One view contends that the specific mantra is important for the individual and must be selected by a person trained in this process. People adhering to this line of thought argue that the mantra’s meaning and “vibrational” quality are important. The other view believes that any mantra that pleases its user is a good one. My own experience as well as many studies conducted at medical and research institutions support the latter view.

If someone has given or sold you a mantra and you are happy with it, use it. Otherwise, select a word or phrase which you find pleasing: “peace,” “love,” “faith,” “kyrie eleison” (“Lord have mercy”), “All is One,” “Ohmm,” etc.

Sit or lie in a comfortable position (as described in the next section, “Steps to Making the Stress-Free Habit Part of Your Life”) and start repeating your mantra. You may speak it aloud or to yourself. Try to think of nothing else. Just repeat the mantra. Stay with it regardless of all the tricks your mind dreams up, the noises that will distract, and the extraneous thoughts. Do not be harsh on yourself, do not feel pressured. When your mind strays, when you begin to think about the mantra’s meaning or lack of meaning, simply say to yourself, “Ah ha, it happened again,” and return to concentration on the mantra. Do not become distraught. We all wander. It is going to happen. This is not a problem, but simply an issue to be addressed.

You may want to position a clock in front of you so you can see it without moving your head. This meditation is usually practiced with the eyes closed, but you can open them periodically to check the time. Try meditating for ten minutes at first. Later you may increase this to fifteen or twenty minutes.

The important thing is to be relaxed. Try to free your mind of all thoughts except your mantra. “But remember: do not become uptight. Even the most proficient practitioners are distracted. You will be too. Frequently. Do not let this upset you. Say “Ah ha, it happened again,” and try to put the distraction behind you. Stay with this meditation for at least ten minutes regardless of how many times you slip. If something occurs that must be attended to (a phone call or injured child, for example), check the clock and take up where you left off at the earliest possible opportunity.

My own experience has been that it is best to stick with one mantra. However, other people switch mantras periodically—a matter of personal preference.

One more comment: many people find it easiest to repeat the mantra as they exhale only, allowing their minds to rest while inhaling; others prefer to repeat it more frequently, independent of breathing patterns. Try it both ways. Meditation is your special time for yourself. It is a luxury you deserve. Do it the way you like best.

Relax and enjoy the mantra meditation. Once you become accustomed to it, you will find it has a tranquilizing effect. And you will probably feel invigorated after practicing



it.

The second meditation method is slightly more complicated. As with the first, you should find a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Imagine yourself at the bottom of a crystal clear lake. You see nothing in front of you, except an occasional rising bubble. The bubble is there for only a few seconds, the time it takes to pass through your line of vision. Do not move your head to follow it. After it disappears you see nothing until the next bubble comes along. Each bubble represents a feeling or thought.

As you sit there—at the bottom of the lake—let your mind go blank. When a thought or feeling enters, see it as a bubble. Watch it float upward. Do not try to understand it. Just watch it. You are not trying to explore this thought or feeling; nor should you attempt to relate it to any other bubbles. Simply observe. After a few seconds, it will rise out of sight. Let it go and calmly wait for the next one.

You may see the same bubble several times. Don't let this disturb you. If you see no bubble at all, enjoy the emptiness. You are in a wonderful, peaceful environment.

The bubble concept allows you to contemplate your thoughts and feelings for a fixed period of time. It provides a structure for seeing into yourself without analyzing what you see, and it forces you to focus on one thing at a time.

This meditation is likely to take more practice than the mantra meditation. Although you may find it enjoyable and relaxing right from the beginning, you may also discover that it puzzles you. Try to ignore the questions. Over time, the confusion should go away. Start with ten minutes at a time. Use a clock as before. Stick with it for the entire period. If you decide you like this meditation, try it for fifteen or twenty minutes.

With both the mantra and bubble forms, when you have completed the session sit quietly for a few minutes. Open your eyes. Concentrate on your surroundings. Move your muscles, stretching them slowly. Keep the good feelings with you. Meditation is a special time. It is your own, very personal time. You have a right to this time. Enjoy it to the fullest. Be aware of the quality of this experience.

Some people come out of meditation feeling euphoric, as if they are an integrated part of the larger universe. Or they feel protected from life's adversities, as though a shield of protective energy has been erected around them. I have experienced some of these and other sensations occasionally; usually I feel invigorated. These feelings are pleasant and may serve beneficial functions at specific times. However, it is best to seek to avoid such feelings during the meditation itself. You should remain relaxed and you should concentrate upon the mantra or the bubbles. Try not to be distracted by other thoughts, feelings, or visions—even euphoric ones. If such things occur after the meditation is over, accept them with thanks; but do not be discouraged if they do not come. Regardless of what sensations you have, it is enough to know that you have benefited. Your blood pressure, heart rate, metabolism, and circulatory and hormonal systems all are better off because you have meditated. You have given yourself a wonderful gift.

The following section describes the steps involved in making the stress-free habit a part of your life. In essence, we are formally defining a compartment (or several compartments) for it. However, I do want to emphasize that the first four elements should be integral parts of your life. Throughout each day, make conscious attempts to stay aware of them. Think frequently about *being* instead of *becoming*. Whenever problems arise, visualize the wall, then shrink it down to size. Concentrate on whatever it is you are doing. Have faith, recognize your faith, feel it, and know that it is there to assist you.

The routine discussed below will begin to help you immediately. Over the long run its effectiveness will be enhanced as your proficiency improves in the areas of being, walking the wall, concentrating, and having faith. The fifth element—meditation—provides a focal point through which you may integrate the others into your daily routine. In addition, as we have seen, meditation by itself is extremely helpful in relieving stress, teaching concentration, and aiding the body.

## **STEPS TO MAKING THE STRESS-FREE HABIT PART OF YOUR LIFE**

The stress-free habit should become a daily habit; that is when it is most effective. Strive constantly to make yourself aware of the first four elements: being, solving problems, concentrating, and having faith. Practice the routine described next, which incorporates the fifth element—meditation—at least once a day. After you become comfortable with it, you may wish to increase this to twice a day.

This routine should not be done on a full stomach. Wait at least an hour after eating, if possible. My personal time preferences are just before breakfast and again shortly before dinner. Sometimes I alter this and practice after arriving in the office and prior to leaving for home. While traveling or at other times when events do not permit me to maintain my normal schedule, I take advantage of available time slots: sitting in airports, waiting rooms, or parks. The important thing is to do it—even when circumstances are not ideal. Make the best of the situation at hand.

If you suffer from a disease or a physical or psychological problem, the stress-free habit may offer therapeutic potential; however, in such cases it should be done only with the approval and under the supervision of your doctor.

Here then are the steps:

1. *Find a quiet and peaceful locale.* It is a matter of personal preference whether you choose a dark corner, a window with a view, or something in between. Ideally, the environment should be one that calms you. It should be as free from outside influences (conversations, telephones, barking dogs, playing children) as possible. However, do not be deterred if you have to settle for something less than perfect. I have practiced in a Peruvian bus packed with people, chickens, and a squealing pig. If my office is noisy and I anticipate a playful daughter at home, I sometimes pullover in an empty parking

lot after leaving work and sit in my car. Use what is available. Do not allow yourself to be anxious about specific interruptions once you have selected the locale and begun the process.

2. *Sit in a comfortable position.* Again, this is a matter of personal preference. It can be in a favorite chair. Or it can be in the lotus meditation position on the floor. You do not have to learn any special techniques. Just make sure you are as comfortable as circumstances permit—but not in a position that is likely to result in drowsiness. I do not recommend lying down, since the temptation of sleeping is too great. Personally, I prefer sitting cross-legged on the floor with my back against a couch or bed; however, I often practice while sitting in my car or office. The Peruvian bus had a hard wooden bench! The critical question is: are you in a position that enables you to relax your muscles? If not, try something else.
3. *Relax.* Just let your body go. Be aware of your muscles and consciously feel the tension flow out of them. This should not be a demanding effort; it should be natural and pleasant. At this time do not concentrate on relaxing specific parts of the body (as you will do in Step 7). Rather, simply “let your body go.” Release the tension. Make sure that your spine maintains its proper posture so as not to impede respiratory and digestive functions. In other words, while your muscles should relax, your skeleton should not slouch. Close your eyes.
4. *Think about who you are.* See yourself in your mind’s eye. Concentrate on those characteristics you prize most highly. You are a parent. A student. An athlete. A musician. A secretary. A person who is proud of physical strength and work. A leader. A good follower. A person who likes to spread goodwill and humor. You are what you are, who you wish to be. Don’t try to become. *Be.*

When you think about *being*, concentrate on two time frames: (1) the general (a parent, an athlete, a secretary) and (2) the immediate (Sally’s mother on the day of her friend Mary’s birthday party, a quarterback faced with a championship game, the department manager’s secretary on the morning when construction bids are due). It is important to keep the long-term, the general, always before you. And you must also face each day with a true sense of being who you are for that day, of bringing out the person in you who represents those characteristics you most admire.

You should not feel forced or pressured during this or any of these steps. You are not trying to analyze yourself. Simply see yourself and think about who you are in general and who you are right now. Enjoy this step. You need not dwell on it. It may be as short as thirty seconds or as long as several minutes. But it should not be forced or produce tension.

5. *Let your mind focus on the greatest problem confronting you.* Put the problem into perspective. Understand that it is not the problem that is your concern. What is causing stress is your lack of a solution.

The fact that Mary is having a birthday party is not your problem. You may need to address the question of what to buy for a present or how to get your daughter to the party on time. Do not attempt to answer these questions during your routine; simply put the problem-solution issue into perspective and promise yourself that you will answer the questions during breakfast, before lunch, or within some other suitable time frame. Think about walking the wall.

If you have a serious problem, this is the time to open yourself to it. Do not run from it or try to ignore it. Admit that the wall is high. Say to yourself: "I don't fully understand how high yet; but I will work on it later today. Before my next stress-reduction routine I shall have a better understanding of this problem."

Many of the events in our lives that seem serious (the impending death of a family member, a deadline of some sort) are not problems over which we have control. However, they may create problems (how to deal with grief, obstacles to meeting the deadline) that require solutions. Try to put these issues into perspective. Define for yourself realistic schedules for dealing with them.

Remember, this is not a time for problem solving. You are dealing with stress, not the problem itself. So do not spend too much time on this step. I try to keep it to under a minute. You are simply identifying your greatest problem, sizing up the height of the wall, and making a commitment to yourself to deal with it.

An objective of this step is to increase your peace of mind and convince your body that "flight or fight" responses are not appropriate for dealing with your problem. This is a stress-shedding exercise, not a problem-solving one. Define a compartment for your problem; then put the problem aside and focus on the next step.

6. *Take a deep breath.* Keep your eyes closed. Breathe in through your nose, hold the air in your lungs for several seconds, and exhale slowly through your mouth.

Let the faith you have in yourself, your religion, an idea, goal, or concept flow throughout your body. Repeat the deep breathing. Feel the strength of faith, like air, as it enters your nose, flows downward, passes from the lungs to the bloodstream, and permeates your body. Think of the exhaled air as a carrier of all your misgivings. Faith enters with each inhalation; doubts are cleansed with each exhalation. In and out. Repeat this several times. You may experience a sensation of being rejuvenated, but do not try to attain this sensation and do not be disturbed if it does not occur. Concentrate on your breathing and the flow of faith within.

7. *Relax.* Let your body go as you did in step 3, except this time concentrate on specific parts of the body. Feel each part and consciously relax it. In some cases it may help to tense the muscle first, then relax it. I find it best to start with the toes. Wiggle them. Then let them go. Make sure they are completely relaxed. Then the rest of the feet. The ankles. Calves. And so on, all the way up to the shoulders and down each arm to the

fingers, tensing if necessary and relaxing. Then the back. Now the neck. The parts of the face: mouth, cheeks, eyes, ears, forehead. Finally, relax the top of your head and then the back of the head.

This step takes practice. If you have not done it before, you may find that, at the beginning, it requires more time than you expected. Be patient. With a little practice, it comes easily and quickly. In a short time it will be almost instantaneous. An added benefit to learning this relaxation technique is that you can use it effectively on many occasions. For example, when you are attending a meeting, a lecture, talking on the phone or watching television, you may—after you have learned this technique—discover that many of your muscles are tense. You will be able to recognize this and relax them.

Once you are completely relaxed, you are ready to meditate.

8. *Meditate.* Use the mantra or bubble meditation as described at the beginning of this chapter, or another that you may have learned. Put your whole body and spirit into this meditation. Do not become disturbed when thoughts, noises, or other intrusions interrupt. Shrug them off and continue. Meditate for at least ten minutes each time you practice. When you have finished, take several minutes to come out of it. Be aware of the environment around you and of your body. Stretch the muscles slowly. Think about the stress-free habit and about the joy of being you.

You may be part of a culture that has not prepared you to cope with stress. You may live in a stressful environment where daily activities expose you to severe tensions. If so, you are one of many millions of people in this predicament. You are prone to physical, emotional, and psychological problems.

You may have picked up the telephone in your office late on a Friday afternoon and learned unexpectedly bad news, news that can ruin a person's weekend, turn a festive holiday sour, and spread an atmosphere of depression throughout your family. Or you may be in a situation where that type of event could occur at any moment.

We all suffer from stress. For some, this is not serious, but simply an irritant. Others are afflicted with physical and emotional ailments that are the direct result of stress: headaches, insomnia, intestinal problems, rashes, lethargy, loss of appetite, and the inability to cope, to name a few. Still others have serious disorders of the nervous, circulatory, and respiratory systems; these stress-related disorders may cripple or kill.

Whether stress causes serious problems for you or only minor irritants, you can improve your situation. Minor irritants have a way of turning serious. Serious afflictions often become life-threatening. And each of us has a duty to make our life as enjoyable and fulfilling as possible. The remedy to stress-induced problems is within you.

It is important that you work toward incorporating this remedy into your life. By reading the preceding pages, you have already taken the first step. Now it is up to you to

continue. Practicing the stress-free habit will help you. It should bring pleasure. You will undoubtedly find that it opens your mind to a new way of looking at many things: the world around, other people, and the person inside you. It is likely that, like me and many others, you will discover a new adventure through the stress-free habit and that this adventure will be one of joy and relaxation as well as exploration and stimulation.

# Footnotes

[\\*1.](#) If you wish to gain a more detailed understanding of this subject, references are provided in the bibliography.

[\\*2.](#) See *Mind-Body-Health Digest*, Vol 1., No.2, 1987, page 3.

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**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA**

Perkins, John M.

The stress-free habit: powerful techniques for health and longevity from the Andes, Yucatan, and Far East / by John M. Perkins.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

eISBN-13: 978-1-59477-732-5

1. Stress management. 2. Stress management—Andes Region. 3. Stress management—Yucatan Peninsula. 4. Stress management—East Asia. I. Title.

RA785.P47 1989

155.9-dc19

89-1670  
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Healing Arts Press is a division of Inner Traditions International

Dream Change Coalition  
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